

# John “Bill” Petrisko

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COHEN: So, hello, welcome. My name is Leah Cohen, today is May 2, 2018. I'm pleased to be with Mr. John Petriska [i.e. Petrisko], a World War II veteran who served in the Navy. We're here at the Pritzker Military Museum & Library. So, welcome and we're looking forward to hearing your story. And so I think we'll begin at the very beginning. Where and when were you born?

PETRISKO: I was born in 8-15-1926 near the town of Brownsville, Pennsylvania.

COHEN: Okay. What was Brownsville like growing up at that time?

PETRISKO: The greatest little city in the world. It was a coal mining, steel mill, industrial area in southwestern Pennsylvania and it was fabulous to have been born and raised there.

COHEN: What did you like about it?

PETRISKO: I liked everything about it - the mountains, the rivers, the village, the people, the ethnic groups, it was wonderful place to be born and raised.

COHEN: Wow. What line of work did your parents do?

PETRISKO: Well, the line of work that my parents and grandparents did was the only available jobs that were coal mining in the western Pennsylvania.

COHEN: Was your mom a stay-at-home mother?

PETRISKO: Mother was a stay at home. I had two sisters and myself and we had -- we had our own home. We had our water supply we had electricity. This was the beginning of the century when most people didn't have like ...an automobile ... a piano, my older sister played violin. We were doing pretty good.

COHEN: Yeah.

PETRISKO: We were doing pretty good. It was a wonderful life.

COHEN: Wonderful beginning. Did your family have any military background, any uncles who served?

PETRISKO: Absolutely not.

COHEN: Yeah. It sounds that even though time-wise, it coincided with the Depression, your family, happily ... did very well

PETRISKO: My family was doing very well until the Depression. After the Depression, things got so tough that my parents couldn't buy gasoline for the model T car that Dad had bought previously. So, it was ... the life was tough but we were never hungry, we were never cold ... and the neighborhood was just beautiful place to live

COHEN: Were people very friendly with each other?

PETRISKO: If there ... they were very friendly and in most cases, we were interrelated. My grandmother, my maternal grandmother and grandfather lived next door to us and about a distance of a quarter of the block down the street, my paternal grandmother and grandfather with their family lived. So, either we were family oriented or we were joined a lot with our religion. We were considered Greek Catholics and most of the people knew each other or were related.

COHEN: A common faith, a common community

PETRISKO: A common community, yes.

COHEN: Um, what was going on in the country and the world when you were growing up? Especially as a teenager?

PETRISKO: Well, first thing that I can remember about 1938, I was staying with my grandmother overnight to keep her company and I turned the radio on and I think it was 1938, Germany had just invaded Czechoslovakia and then I realized that things were not perfect in the world but in 1941, Dec. 7, 1941, I was in a theatre in Brownsville, Pennsylvania, I think Abbott & Costello, **Hold that Ghost**, the movie of the day, about half way through the movie, [pause, sighs] the lights went on -- see, this is not going to be good -- and they announced that Pearl Harbor was...bombed.

COHEN: Oh my.

PETRISKO: And all servicemen were asked to go back to their base, immediately. So, the next day, in the high school, in the auditorium, Franklin Roosevelt, our President, declared war on Japan and things got a little bit hairy. Now, in '44, the family moved from the Pennsylvania area to Chicago and after the summer of, during the summer of '44, I asked my parents for permission to join the Navy and they authorized my permission to go and I joined in the Navy in 1944. I...

COHEN: Could we just go back a little back?

PETRISKO: Oh, sure.

COHEN: If it's ok. Did people in your school discuss Pearl Harbor? Like it sounds very... like it had a strong impact ... in a public places, all of a sudden, there's an announcement...

PETRISKO: Absolutely, and the feeling in the community and in the school, if everybody was 100% in favor of Franklin Dela-- Roosevelt declaring war on Japan and everybody just pitched in, and in three years, we ... our mines and mills and factories out produced the rest of the world and we were able to beat Japan and Germany.

COHEN: Yeah. Which high school did you go to in Pennsylvania and which one later on in Chicago?

PETRISKO: In Pennsylvania, I went to Centerville High School and I played more sports than I did studying and I've played basketball, baseball, and football. And when we moved to Chicago, I just finished my junior year at Centerville and I worked at the factories in Chicago for a few months when I decided to ask my parents for permission to join the Navy. So I did not finish my high school career, I joined the Navy.

COHEN: How did your parents react when you asked them for their permission? Did they --

PETRISKO: My mother was okay with it but my father said, "Son, do you think that you're going to go to a dance? Are you sure you want to join the service?" But I did what everybody else was doing. Either you waited 'til you were eighteen and you were drafted and put in whatever service they wanted you in. Or you joined the Navy, to choose the Navy, but you had to volunteer.

COHEN: Oh. So, is that why you chose the Navy?

PETRISKO: Yes, I liked the uniform.

COHEN: [Laughs. indecipherable] I've heard this in a lot of the interviews, actually. Were there other friends, as well, who enlisted at the same time as you?

PETRISKO: Not at the same time because most of my friends were still in Pennsylvania and I had, and we had just moved to Chicago.

COHEN: And, um, where, where and when did you enlist?

PETRISKO: I enlisted in downtown Chicago in the June of '44.

COHEN: Um, was there. Was there...?

PETRISKO: It was at Plymouth Court, Chicago, that was the recruiting station.

COHEN: It was called Plymouth Court?

PETRISKO: That was the street that it was on.

COHEN: Did they enlist you for an amount of time, like did they enlist you for a year? How did it work?

PETRISKO: I'll tell you. If you wanted to enlist in the Navy, you had to enlist for a minimum six years.

COHEN: Wow.

PETRISKO: But if you enlisted in what they had - they had a program that they called the V6 program that meant that you were technically in the US Naval Reserves but you were active in the Navy and you were committed to Victory plus six months. So if the war had lasted twenty years, I would have been in the Navy for twenty years and six months. But the way it worked out, I only spent

about two years in the Navy because Victory plus six months. So Victory was when they dropped the bomb on Japan in '45 so in the middle of '46, I was out.

COHEN: Ok, ok, so you were out. After you enlisted, after you signed up, did you have to go right away to basic training?

PETRISKO: Now. They give us about three weeks before they send us up to Great Lakes for the basic training.

COHEN: Okay. And what was basic training like at Great Lakes camp?

PETRISKO: It was interesting [laughs]. They made a man out of a boy in three months.

COHEN: [Laughs]

PETRISKO: They get us ready to learn to accept commands and follow orders and to be responsible to not only yourself but 120 other guys that was in the same company because we had to compete with other companies in marching, the drill field or at swimming pool.

Cohen: So it was a competitive thing. Okay. What was the people like and did the enlisted men and the men who were drafted get along together?

PETRISKO: I wouldn't be able to answer that because all my contemporaries that were in the Navy at the time did the same thing, I did. They voluntarily enlisted.

COHEN: Um, what was your military occupation specialty?

PETRISKO: I was originally assigned to seaman's duty which meant chipping paint and keeping the ship looking good and I decided to see if I could get into the Engine Room, below deck and work as a mechanic, which I did.

COHEN: Did you receive training as a mechanic while you were still at Great Lakes? Or is that at a later phase?

PETRISKO: The mechanic training was like an internship on board ship, on the actual ... on the job training, in other words.

COHEN: Okay, and what was your first assignment after you completed the basic training?

PETRISKO: Well, the first assignment was like, I went down to Camp Bradford and we were ... some of the guys were assigned to schools and I was assigned to a minesweeper that had just come back from the Mediterranean.

COHEN: Ok. So what were you doing when you're in Virginia, waiting for this ship to arrive?

PETRISKO: Well, while this ship is being worked on, we spend several weeks on the land base and it was a bunch of Quonset huts and it was very military. You had to get up at a certain time, eat at a certain time, and follow orders all the time.

COHEN: [Laughs] Did you have any down time whatsoever or-?

PETRISKO: There is no such thing as down time, when you're in the service.

COHEN: [Laughs]

PETRISKO: If they have nothing else to do, they'll assign you to clean patrol area, pick up the butts, or clean security or make it clean.

COHEN: Well, I guess a related question and I don't know if it exists ... did you have a possibility to go back and visit your family in Chicago within this training period or waiting period?

PETRISKO: No.

COHEN: No. okay. So, while the USS Steady arrives, so could you describe your responsibilities a little bit more and how...? You touched on it a little bit but how you progressed from being a seaman to being a mechanic and so on?

PETRISKO: I really didn't start being a mechanic until after the ship had been in the Pacific and they trained you to prepare the engine, starts the engines, do different jobs while you were at sea. You had to maintain the oil pressure and the engines had to be drawn to a certain temperature, it's just basic operations of diesel engines.

COHEN: Oh, ok. You listed before when we were talking that most of the crew had been there before – they were in Europe, in Italy in particular and you and at least two others joined up at Norfolk. So, how did people get along?

PETRISKO: We got along like family - I had no problem and I knew of no other problems of people not getting along, because you're living in such close quarters; you have about eight inches on a bunk bed, three bunks high and you learn adjust to the current situation.

COHEN: How many men were on the boat and how big was the boat? Any idea?

PETRISKO: I think it was about 220 foot long and maybe twenty foot deep and it drew about six foot of water. It wasn't a big ship - it was a small ship, specially designed.

COHEN: How many seamen were on it?

PETRISKO: I think the crew was 120, maybe hundred crew and twenty officers.

COHEN: Wow. You mentioned before that this ship, I guess it being a minesweeper ship, was small. Certainly, it was smaller than a battleship; so it makes me wonder: how does the boat fare during storms?

PETRISKO: [Laughs] Not well, but it didn't sink.

COHEN: [Laughs] Did you get seasick?

PETRISKO: Never got seasick a day in my life. Most of them called them "Salt", the older sailors, some of them the minute they threw the line off, moved away from the dock, they were sick but I never had any problem with being sick. I ate a full meal at every sitting!

COHEN: Had you ever been to sea on a trip before this?

PETRISKO: No, no. That was my first experience of being away from home, period.

COHEN: Wow. Well, this brings me to another question. How...were you able to communicate with your family when you were on the ship and if so, how did it work?

PETRISKO: Well, by mail. The Navy would pick up the letters to and from the ship, maybe once or twice a month. It wasn't a regular, daily delivery and being out at sea, they ... I guess the Air Force would drop mail on the ship and I don't know how they -- they didn't have radio at the time or not like we have now but we would write, write letters and eventually they would be picked up and sent back home to the parents.

COHEN: Did you write a lot of letters to your ...

PETRISKO: Enough to keep communication between Mum and Dad and myself.

COHEN: So one thing about the trip on the USS Steady from the Atlantic coast in Norfolk going towards the Pacific. For example, was it a tight fit going through the locks of the Panama Canal? What was it like?

PETRISKO: After we left Norfolk, we sailed south on the Atlantic to the Port of Colone, Panama and the next day, we went across the Canal from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean and next to Balboa, City of Balboa, and next stop after Balboa, Pearl Harbor.

COHEN: How long was the ship at these stop like at Balboa or later?

PETRISKO: Just, usually, Balboa was just a way to get in line to go across the Panama Canal

COHEN: I see.

PETRISKO: But the other ... just not time its first stop, was Pearl Harbor - refuel and get supplies and get ready for our next ship which was up towards the Island of Japan.

COHEN: Did you have - were you allowed to go off the boat at the Pearl Harbor since it was a longer stop?

PETRISKO: Yes, we did a delivery at Pearl Harbor that was just like an afternoon to the same evening because it was actually pretty expensive to go into Honolulu from the ship. Most of the sailors didn't have any money to go on liberty.

COHEN: So self-limiting. So, I think you mentioned that the ship stopped at the Mariana Island, like Saipan and Guam, so what was the purpose of that? Or was it similar to refueling and so on?

PETRISKO: It was easier for refueling or getting nearer to the Island of Japan because I think the first island after going north, after Pearl Harbor was Guam and the next island was Saipan and the next island was Enewetak part of Marshall Island chains. But after that, the next stop was Okinawa.

COHEN: Did the ship have to change its course or zig zag to avoid kamikazes or suicide boats or...?

PETRISKO: All the time.

COHEN: All the time. Can you remember a specific incident or-- ?

PETRISKO: I don't remember an incident but one of our sister ships had been almost hit by kamikaze pilot and they rushed him and took him on board ship and we didn't have a brig on this ship so they put them in ...they had to put them in a security. So, they put him in the kitchen where we had an area which was secure.

COHEN: A Japanese pilot?

COHEN: Oh, that had attacked a sister ship and he was being held within your ship because they didn't have the space?

PETRISKO: Right.

COHEN: So what happened to this prisoner? Japanese prisoner, then?

PETRISKO: I don't know because it was on a different ship but I imagine they were treated respectfully and kept, given food but kept them under surveillance because we were at war and they were our enemy.

COHEN: Yeah, yeah. So, did your ship go to Okinawa itself or were they at the islands nearby like the Kerama Retto or--

PETRISKO: My ship was one of, I think, 5 or 6, 9<sup>th</sup> Division, 19 fleet. They ... We were, we were all minesweepers, the same style and capability. We could either cut the mines, change it and they would float to the surface and we would use the 40 mm gun to put holes in them and they would sink to the bottom of the ocean or if we hit one of the barnacles, it would explode the mines and it would destroy itself.

COHEN: You know, I was reading a little bit about minesweeping and I'm not so technically inclined so thank you for explaining that! [Laughs]

PETRISKO: The minesweeper, it was a specialized piece of equipment like --

COHEN: How were the mines detected? Was it--

PETRISKO: They were either detected by sonar or they had several other... I don't think ... Yeah, I think it was just sonar. They could pick up their position and location and we could work around it where they were usually more about six to eight feet under the surface of the water with a

chain or a cable. And on the back of the mine sweepers they had cables that went out like a V at the back of the ship that had charges on it, like a cutter. When our ship would put the stuff out for the sweep, they would cut the cables of the mines and the mines would float to the top and these are ... We would sink them by putting a hole with a 40 mm or if they hit one of the barnacles, it would explode.

COHEN: Ok, did this ship also place mines in the water?

PETRISKO: No.

COHEN: And one thing I was wondering about -- was also some sort of surface search radar on this particular ship?

PETRISKO: Yeah. The ship, I guess, they called it degauging. It was, Most of the mines were either anti surface or mines that could be sent off with sound detection. The engine could ... Or if the mines would happen to be near the ship, magnetism would draw the mine and it would hit the ship and blow it up. But the ship was degauged somehow which was anti-magnetic so the Japanese magnet mines didn't work. In other words, we kept from getting blown up if we got close to a mine.

COHEN: So somehow, it would neutralize magnetically the mine?

PETRISKO: Yes, without degauging, the mine would be attracted to the metal of the ship and it would blow it up.

COHEN: I see.

PETRISKO: They were pretty well ahead of – with technology to prevent us from not getting blown up.

COHEN: So, it sounds that were a few [indecipherable] ... the cutter of the chain, the magnetic and the sound one, as well, as a way to identify ...

PETRISKO: Yeah.

COHEN: Wow. So were these tools also effective against ...at detecting submarines or enemy aircraft?

PETRISKO: We had the sonar that would detect the submarines and we also had aerial radar that would detect the aircraft.

COHEN: Ok. So, could you describe some of your jobs because I know sometimes it was working with the engines, but again you were also working with the minesweeping? Could you describe, let's say what a typical day would look like either with the engines or the minesweeping?

PETRISKO: Well, if we weren't sweeping mines, it was just an ordinary day of being a mechanic on a cruise ship. You would get up in the morning and have breakfast I think our assignment was four hours duty, four hours off and you would tend the machines in the Engine Room whether it be checking the oil or the water or just checking the heat gages, it was just a routine job.

COHEN: Ok. So was the ship true to its name? [i.e., USS Steady].

PETRISKO: Yes.

COHEN: Did the engines, systems work reliably?

PETRISKO: It was excellent. The name was USS Steady and steady it was. I couldn't find a thing wrong with it and I was happy to be aboard.

COHEN: Wow, wow. Just by the by, I was reading an encyclopedia article about this ship and it sort of struck me how the ship is written about in a very warm way, like as if like a "she" as if people felt warmly towards the ship, itself. Was that a reflection of your feelings, as well?

PETRISKO: Yes, it felt like a home away from home!

COHEN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. You mentioned in the questionnaire that the ship did have some interactions with enemy boats. So could you describe the incidents, please?

PETRISKO: Actually, we didn't have a direct contact with another ship. In other words, we were ... we only had a 3 inch 50 gun on this ship and it wouldn't have been big enough to actually engage a submarine to the surface. So our job was not combative, it was there as a minesweeper to get rid of the mines.

COHEN: Did you and the crew have any personal ammunition for defense or--

PETRISKO: Oh, yeah. We had one 3 inch 50 gun on the main deck, that was our largest gun and then for anti-aircraft, we had 40 mm - two 40 mm on the boat deck and I think two 20 mm on the main deck for use if aircraft came in for an attack. We had some firepower.

COHEN: Wow. So, did you ever feel in danger?

PETRISKO: Never.

COHEN: Wow.

PETRISKO: I prayed once in a while. I really did.

COHEN: Did you feel that it strengthened your faith?

PETRISKO: Sure did. That's why I'm sitting here today. My faith has always been strong.

COHEN: When you were on the ship in the Pacific did you ever have liberty leave, then too? And if so, where did you go?

PETRISKO: There was no liberty during the time of the war but after the Japanese surrendered we were able to go liberty once or twice - Okinawa and while we were in the area, the USS Missouri, the battleship where the Peace Treaty was signed, it was in the area, and we were able to go on liberty cruise from our small ship to this big ship for a Sunday Mass. That was the only other

time and then we sailed up into the Kagoshima Bay area of Japan, the town of Susabo directly after the war, but there wasn't much left there. The town was destroyed by B-29 bombers so there wasn't any liberty but we did get off the ship. But when we finished sweeping the mines out of the East China Sea waters, we did go on liberty to Shanghai, China. We were at Shanghai for Christmas of 1945.

COHEN: Oh my. What were your impressions of Shanghai?

PETRISKO: It was different - it would impress me the most when we had to go off the boat on from a ship, from out in the bay to the city of Shanghai, I saw neon signs, Campbell cigarettes, Lucky Strike, Coca Cola [both laugh]. I figured this doesn't sound like a Chinese port to me. But once we got on into the city there was rickshaws, It was very Oriental but we were treated with respect. We had just beaten Japan who had suppressed China and Manchuria which is now Korea. The Japanese were less than nice people.

COHEN: How? A few questions. When you first came to Okinawa area and the boat, did you and the crew, like, know that Okinawa would be the base from which the US would launch their attack ... ?

PETRISKO: Never knew a thing?

COHEN: Did you hear about other news? Like would you hear about the Victory in Europe? Or you know, the death of Roosevelt?

PETRISKO: We knew that the European theater had just closed because the Germans surrendered but it all ended rather suddenly, really. Germany and the Axis, which was Germany, Italy and Japan, surrendered pretty much in a short period of time.

COHEN: How did people react who were still in the Pacific? Like who...you know? Like your crew, for example?

PETRISKO: Everybody was happy that it was over and that we could get back to our normal lifestyle.

COHEN: How did you hear about this? The V-J Day? How did you know about it?

PETRISKO: I guess, the ships...the ships were equipped with radios. They had intercom with each other...So, maybe the lead ship heard that the A-bomb had been dropped and the Japanese were about to surrender.

COHEN: Yeah. Did you ever meet or work with any foreign military personnel? The British for example?

PETRISKO: Never.

COHEN: Okay. Did you have any interactions with higher ranking officers?

PETRISKO: No. Never had any conflict with them. [Both laugh]

COHEN: I was one of the good sailors that obeyed orders.

COHEN: Trustworthy.

PETRISKO: Always.

COHEN: And when your duty of at the East China Sea was over, how did you get back to the United States?

PETRISKO: First, liberty in Shanghai, Christmas and then refueling, and we started back in January, I think in February, we landed at San Pedro, California, where we decommissioned the ship. We got it ready for the moth balls. In other words, they took it out service but they also serviced it like you would a snowmobile or snow plower. In other words, when the season was over, you'd do certain things in to prepare if for the next year. So, that's what happened in San Pedro.

COHEN: Did you and the crew stay in San Pedro for a while? Did you have other responsibilities at that time?

PETRISKO: Just a few weeks, maybe. That's where we had the ship party at Bloomington, California for the crews of the ships before we embarked on the El Capitan that was a streamlined train from California to Great Lakes.

COHEN: Oh, okay, so then you all went back to the Great Lakes Base.?

PETRISKO: Yes. For discharge, honorable discharge and what they called it, a ruptured duck. It was a little pin, naval that you wore on a civilian suit when you got home to show that you had been in the service and that you had been honorably discharged.

COHEN: Did you wear it a lot?

PETRISKO: Oh sure. I've got it in the display

COHEN: [Laughs] Thank-you. So, how long was it from returning to the Great Lakes base and the discharge until you returned to your home?

PETRISKO: Well, just a short period of time and I think we were given a small amount of money to get us on the train back home to start our civilian life again.

COHEN: Was it a transition going back to civilian life after having been in a combat zone?

PETRISKO: I adjusted pretty well and most all the other soldiers and sailors did the same thing. We saw the responsibility, we accepted it, and we did it, returned to prepare for our lives.

COHEN: So, how did you continue to prepare for your life? Your work? Your study?

PETRISKO: Well, my father had been working for Gordon Baking Company in Chicago. He was in the Maintenance, in the Bakery part. So when I was discharged, I didn't have any real formal education except being a mechanic in the Navy so I was hired as truck mechanic with Gordon Baking Company. In the meantime, the GI Bill of Rights was given to all the servicemen during

the 2nd World War that if you wanted to go to school for either a vocational, medical, sports whatever, the government paid for our education.

COHEN: Ok. So what did you chose to--?

PETRISKO: I chose to be a mechanic. And I worked as a mechanic for over forty-five years with only two different companies. One was Gordon Baking Company and the other was Certified Grocers of Illinois and I've been a member of the locale 701 Mechanics Union for over sixty-five years, forty-five of them were active of them were active; twenty of them have been in retirement.

COHEN: Well, I'll ask an obvious question but maybe there's more to it. How did being in the Navy contribute to your civilian life?

PETRISKO: Well, it taught me a lesson to .... Well, I'm not sure what to say ...accept life as it comes and do the best that you can. Always be honest, share ... That's about it.

COHEN: Yeah. Honest. Values. Did you receive any medals? [Inaudible] You mentioned that you had received some medals or special service awards?

PETRISKO: Just two battle stars for engagement in the Pacific Theater.

COHEN: Okay, so--

PETRISKO: That's the ribbons you have with the couple of stars on it.

COHEN: Yes, yes. Were these for like a specific event or was it a general service or..?

PETRISKO: For two specific events.

COHEN: Which were they?

PETRISKO: They were battles of Okinawa and, maybe, East China Sea.

COHEN: Okay, so you were involved in minesweeping during those battles?

PETRISKO: Yeah, that's right.

COHEN: Wow. Was there like a moment or experience that you think typified your service? That seemed to be... It doesn't have to be, like...

PETRISKO: No

COHEN: No, ok.

PETRISKO: I was always happy that I was able to do my little part in the victory over the Axis.

COHEN: Yeah, yeah. What do you think that younger generations can learn from your experiences?

PETRISKO: That's open to...somebody will have to determine that. I wouldn't want to judge. All I can do is remember what I did for my country at the time I did it and I was happy to do it.

COHEN: Wow. Are you or have been involved in any veteran's organizations?

PETRISKO: No, I have not.

COHEN: Are you in touch with anybody with whom you served?

PETRISKO: No, I have not. I'm sorry for that but I didn't keep up the friendship but I didn't have the names as my sailor friends that were on the ship when I was discharged.

COHEN: Yeah, I think it's easier almost nowadays that things because it's been digitized that would have been harder... in the past.

PETRISKO: I tried to make contact with anybody that may have been on board ship when I was on board. I even wrote in to a Navy department but I guess it was personal information, they couldn't give out.

COHEN: Yeah.

PETRISKO, JESSICA: You met that one, somebody on the ship, though. Remember?

PETRISKO, Dan: Yes [inaudible]

PETRISKO: Once, about seventy years after I left the Navy, our daughters had me out - we were shopping, just in the past, just, I think two or three years. We were shopping in Orland Park at a Walmart and I usually wear my hat when I go out, Navy hat and some old guy come up to me, you know, and he shook my hand and he says, "Thanks for your service". I says, "You're welcome." He says, "You know, I was in the service, too." I said, "Oh yeah?" So I told him, I says, "I was at Great Lakes Company 1612." And he says, "I think maybe I was in that company too!" So, we exchanged telephone numbers and he went home and he called me up, he says, "Jesus, I was on the big picture [of the company]."

COHEN: Yeah.

PETRISKO: He was on the picture, left side, six rows or two rows down, six rows over. He was--

COHEN: [Interrupts] Oh, my...the same...

PETRISKO: He was guy by the name of...what the hell was his name, now? I had it on the end of my tongue. But he was two sailors away from me on the picture.

COHEN: Oh my goodness.

PETRISKO: And then we were going to try to get together but in the meantime ... I wanted to get an article in the newspaper about it because after seventy years to meet somebody that you're been in service with, you know, like I just explained, but he passed away. So.

COHEN: Oh. Well...

PETRISKO: I'm trying to give you his name but I can't get his name.

COHEN: Oh, that's ok.

PETRISKO: But I met somebody that was in my company seventy years after the picture was taken, by chance.

COHEN: Wow, wow. Something. You know, you also mentioned the story before the interview about... that your father and your grandfather had worked in manufacturing the ammunition that was used that for the gun on the ship. Can you tell that again?

PETRISKO: Yes. That was the main part ... the large ship gun that was on our ship. It was a 3 inch 50, it was the main section of the gun that accepted the shell when ... It was put intact so. My father worked in this.... It was Continental Can Ordinance Plant 78 in Clearing, Illinois, with a couple of my uncles were... Everything was in war production. Continental Can made cans but at that time, they were making parts for guns.

COHEN: I see. Makes sense. Did you ever go back to the Pacific, to Japan or China or?

PETRISKO: No. I went back to the Pacific three times, to Pearl Harbor with my wife [both laughing]. It's a beautiful place to live.

COHEN: Where did you meet your wife and when did you get married?

PETRISKO: I met my wife, probably... I'll back it up a little bit. During the war, Ann's mother and my mother worked in a Defense Plant on Western Ave in Chicago, Solar Electric. They made electrical components.

COHEN: Sure.

PETRISKO: But anyway we didn't know about that. But I met my wife at either a dance, a neighborhood dance, or a church. We were from the same church, St. Mary's Byzantine Catholic Church on South Seeley Ave. And we found out that our mothers worked in the same factory. So, we and we were the same nationality, same religion, and I loved [he laughs]... it was love ... the rest is history.

COHEN: [Laughs] That's wonderful. I assume that you met her after you returned?

PETRISKO: Yeah.

COHEN: Returned to the US, that's wonderful. Umm, well, what question is a little bit odd but interesting is: How did you feel about the boots you were issued?

PETRISKO: About the?

COHEN: The boots. I think our Director of Collections was at one time considering doing an exhibit on the boots that people wore in the army, the navy. How, what was it like?

PETRISKO: I really ... They were just ordinary shoes but the camps were called boot camps. [All laugh] Why they called them boot camps? Because maybe in the First World War they had special shoes that they were issued but the shoes that we had, had nothing to do with boots. It was just a name for the camp.

COHEN: Ok. And what kind of uniform did you wear on the day to day versus festive occasions?

PETRISKO: Well, when you were not working, you had what they called dungarees, those blue jeans and a shirt. And for informal affairs, you had a non-dress uniform which was a little better than blue jeans, but then for the summer months we had white uniforms and for the winter months we had heavy wool uniforms that were dark uniforms.

COHEN: Yeah, ok. Wow. Um. Going back, jumping back a little bit, what was the weather like when you were on the boat in the Pacific?

PETRISKO: Just beautiful. It was always warm. [Laughs] We would occasionally have to sent-- like sentry duty on board the ship, on the dock or on the decks, rather. And I remember I'd lay on this.. my head on the life jacket on and the helmet under my head, I lay on the sealed deck and I would look up at the beautiful sun or the moon in the sky and it was ... I love the warm weather [all laugh]

COHEN: Enjoyed the sun?

PETRISKO: Yeah. It was fine.

COHEN: Do you have a definition of what it means to be a Citizen Soldier?

PETRISKO: Honor. To this day, I respect the flag, I honor the flag and I love our country. If I talk any longer, I'll start crying.

COHEN: Ok, ok [all laugh]. Well, then, maybe I'll just ask your, your granddaughter and son is there some story I should ask about or question that I did not ask that would be great to ask or what?

PETRISKO, DAN: I liked the story about – Didn't you sleep in once a little later than you should have, and that sort of pushed you in one direction versus than one?

PETRISKO: Yeah, but I didn't want to bring that up.

COHEN: Okay [all laugh].

PETRISKO: It was getting back to relationship between a command- ... not a commanding officer but an officer and a non-commissioned officer. Once I was supposed to have been on duty as a watchman and I had fallen asleep, didn't cause any damage or anything but was I was found asleep on the job so I was subjected to I think about fifteen hours extra duty which meant doing duties on board ship that nobody else wanted to do [all laugh]. Other than that, the only other

blemish on my record would be a misdemeanor. For having a little part of an operation that was actually part of a health club fundraiser but I'll leave it at that. [All laugh]

COHEN: Okay, well...That's very.... I think just one last question just came to me at this moment was did the ship itself have any damage from the time when it was in the Pacific?

PETRISKO: None.

COHEN: None, so it was a lucky ship, too?

PETRISKO: It was a lucky ship, that's why that little piece that I had given you about the battleship Pennsylvania [which] went all through the war and probably discharged more shells than any other ship. Forty to Forty-eight hour before the signing of the Arm[istice] – surrender, a kamikaze hit it and put a hole in the side of it. It didn't sink but t I'm sure there was casualties and damage.

COHEN: Yeah.

COHEN: Well, really, on behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum & Library, we thank obviously for coming in today and for your service in the past.

PETRISKO: It is an honor and a duty. I really enjoyed it. I couldn't be happier to been part of your presentation.

COHEN: Thank you so much!