

Richard C. Rung

Thursday, June 13, 2018

Interviewed by Leah Cohen

Transcribed by Eric Bradach

Edited by Eric Bradach & Leah Cohen

Cohen: Hi. My name is Leah Cohen. I'm here on behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum & Library. And I have the honor of interviewing Dr. Richard Rung, who was in the [United States] Navy on D-Day and also served in the Pacific. So, thank you very much agreeing to be interviewed. We often start out with just a little bit on what was life like growing up. So, where and when were you born?

Rung: I was born in Buffalo, New York. I went to high school. High school is important. I took automobile mechanics. So, that... the Navy... I chose the Navy, and the Navy saw I had that. Their landing craft, had the kind of a mechanical things that I understood [due to my training]. So, that's how I got in the US Naval Amphibious.

Cohen: So, because the background training in mechanics was relevant?

Rung: Yes. Otherwise, I might never have landed [at Omaha Beach]

Cohen: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Rung: Yes. I have two brothers. One was in the Army, and I was the youngest [and in the Navy] ... The next in line was Paul, and then there was Edward. So, Ed didn't go into the service, he had two children. But Paul did, and Paul died last year and he was with the 29th Division in the Army, and he landed at Omaha [Beach] too, but I'm not sure what day because [he never talked about it.]

Cohen: What was it like growing up in Buffalo at the time?

Rung: Of course, Buffalo has terrible weather in the winter. That part you remember, you know? And so... Buffalo... all of us... had a paper route. And my oldest brother had it and then he passed it on to Paul, and then... I was quote un-quote, the baby, so I got this... I had about fifty customers, I had... the *Buffalo Evening News*. So, that background did one thing for me that I didn't like. I couldn't play any sports. Every day at 3:30, I had to be home to deliver the papers. So, one thing I hated about the paper route wasn't just the delivery, but I had to go and collect the money on Saturday morning. My

mother would wake me up and say, "You have to get up and go collect the money, today." Some Saturday mornings, I could just wake up and say, "Uh, oh." Yeah, I have to do this. I have to do this. [Laughter]

Cohen: What did your parents do? Where did...

Rung: Oh, my dad was, he worked in a factory. My mother didn't work. But my dad worked there for about twenty years and it was a terrible place. It was a chemical plant. And so, eventually, my father died because of that job because his lungs went bad...? So, that...that background. But we lived in a lower middle-class neighborhood. You knew everybody. So, my background there is very important because we had all these friends. You don't have that today. I mean, people are moving all the time, we didn't move. And about four young men that I knew were killed in World War II.

Cohen: Oh wow ... the neighborhood...

Rung: The neighborhood idyll, yeah.

Rung: Did your father or any other relative serve in the military early on in life?

Rung: No. Paul... my brother and I were the only two...he died last year but... Ed didn't go because of his children. You know, if they'd run out of men but they weren't drafting men with two children, at the time...

Cohen: When you were still in high school, did people talk about the war? Like, do you remember the attack on Pearl Harbor for example?

Rung: Yeah... when Pearl Harbor was struck, it was struck on Sunday by Japanese air craft. And I went to school the next morning. That was on Monday. And one of my friends that I went to... he was one of those friends that you have that's there all the time all the time... he said, "I'm going to enlist." I said, "You're going to enlist? When they need you--they'll draft you." So... but I should tell you the end of that... he joined the Navy, and he's six foot...I didn't know why they did this...six foot tall and they put him in a submarine. Now, I didn't know this for years. I knew he was on a sub. But I met his brother years later. I didn't know what happened to Albert...but, they had a brand new sub. It was called the Wahoo, and they--he was on this sub, and they were on a shakedown cruise. You know, you don't deliver stuff to the military until they check it out. So, he is on this sub, and the shakedown crew is on the Pacific. And the Japanese sunk the sub. So, I never saw Albert again. But somewhere in the Pacific is Albert [i.e., Albert's remains].

Cohen: Oh. So some of your friends, such as Albert, chose to enlist?

Rung: Right. Not only that, but beyond that, I had another friend that went to my church. We were in Sunday school class together, and he was killed at Iwo Jima. And another friend that lived not too far from me--I didn't know him too well. He was just one of the neighborhood boys--he was killed there to. So, I lost four of my friends, and I... I came out of this.

Cohen: So, when were you drafted?

Rung: I was drafted in 1943.

Cohen: And how old were you at the time?

Rung: Eighteen. You know, they were...drafting eighteen year olds... I was just out of school.

Cohen: You just got out of school?

Rung: Yeah. And I, you know, this thing arrives and says you have to report for duty. So, when I was [drafter]... they said you can have any service you want. The Marines, the Navy, the Army. And I didn't know what I was going to do. What does an eighteen year old know? So, I went home and I talked to my father and he said, "Dick, if I were you, I'd joined the Navy." And this was terrible because I always wanted the [US] Marines. You know why? This is terrible to. Because I loved the uniforms, the dress uniforms. [Laughter] Yeah, well, my dad was very straight. And when I said, "I'm thinking about the Marines." He said, "You'll get killed." He said, "The Marines are doing all the invasions of the islands in the Pacific. At least on a ship, you're can get something to eat to." I never thought of that, but that's my background. And my dad was right. My dad, I said, "I'll join the Navy." And so... that's how it happened.

Cohen: So, where did you go to enlist? Was it in Buffalo? Or, where were you drafted? Was it in Buffalo?

Rung: Yeah... it was known as Riverside. It's one part of Buffalo. And it wasn't too far away from --the draft board.

Cohen: How long was it after you were drafted until you had to go to basic training?

Rung: I think they gave me two weeks. And then I... and this is important. My training camp was Sampson [Naval Training Base]. And Sampson was in Geneva, New York, on the Finger Lakes...And then after Sampson, they found out I knew something about mechanics, so they sent me to Richmond, Virginia, to the US Naval Institute for diesels.

Cohen: So, what did you... which skills did you learn while you were at the basic training?

Rung: Okay. I... I knew something about gasoline engines. All of these new landing crafts were diesels. So, they sent me to Diesel [Mechanic] School and that was wonderful, except the engine room on that 539 is low...you had to go almost on your knees to check the engines because they were so low. I still believe some of my problems in my legs were because of [this experience]. I'm not blaming them but... [Laughter] yeah. Oh, yeah. When I came out the Navy. The marvelous thing is that the GI Bill. I got four years, plus a master's degree...my brother, he didn't [use the G.I Bill] ... you know, he could have done the same but he didn't do it. "Oh yeah, go to school." I was the first one in my generation who went to college.

Cohen: So, to back up a little bit more, what was it like at Sampson? Where you training with boats? Did you swim? What was a typical day like?

Rung: Yeah, okay. The training at Sampson has nothing to do with boats. We went out with row boats and rowed around but... when I got through at Sampson, they were already starting to get the equipment because they knew they were going to be at... France, you know. So, I... one thing I got out of Sampson was... the chief, that is the guy who was over me... he ran us everywhere. We were known as "Rainey's runners." We would run, run, run to class. So... the other thing, when you enter the Navy they check your dental... And I... I had one bad tooth or pain in the back. My wisdom tooth. I'll never forget this. So, they sent me to this dentist, and... he said... he practically sat on me to get me...But this... I've never told too many people this story. He had a blonde nurse, and he paid more attention to her. [Laughter] So, he used a drill... and it went right into my lower lips... and I've never forgotten this. He said, when he got done, he said, well, he stopped. It didn't bleed that much. He said, "Well, you're done. You'll be okay." And the blonde said, "Are you going to thank the doctor?" And I said, "What for? For this?" [Laughter] So, those are the stories. Yeah, yeah, I never forgotten that dentist. Then I had the night watch that very night. I was at Sampson. And a night watch was a fire watch. You know, there are always worries about fires in the camps. So, you had to... I had twelve to four. Twelve o'clock at night to four in the morning. I was miserable. So, I wasn't glad I was on watch because I walked for hours. All of those stories are for real. [Laughter] But... I guess the training at the diesel institute was really good. But, you know, when I came home, I met this woman. We married, and I was in the church and the pastor said to me, "Why don't you use your GI Bill? Why don't you go to school?" I said, "Are you kidding?" And he said, "No." So... she was already in college. She had come home to marry me. So, I said, "Okay, I'll give it a

whirl." But I... see, I didn't have any pre-college training. Things you have to have had. Yeah, you know, language ... I needed five subjects before the school would even look at me. She helped me there. So, I made up the five high school subjects because I went to vocational school. I didn't go to a regular [high] school.

Cohen: How did you meet her?

Rung: Meet her? Oh. My cousin was crazy about her sister. And my cousin and I were, you know, buddies. We fished together. So, one time this cousin of mine, who really liked her sister said, "I have to go pick up my date. And we are going swimming." Or something. So, I walked in, and she was sitting there, and I said, "How about going out tonight? We're going to swim. We're going to bonfire." And that was it.

Cohen: Wow. That's really nice.

Rung: Yeah. She's been invaluable. I mean, I wouldn't have gone... probably on to college if I hadn't met her because she helped me with correspondence with schools. When I went to college, she typed all of my papers. She's marvelous.

Cohen: Wow. She really is.

Rung: I know. I try not to tell her that too often. [Laughter] But she... you know, because I can't believe I ended up a college professor with tenure. I mean, you know, I went to vocational school. It would have never of happened again because... when the GI Bill came out, a lot of vets went to college, you know. So, a lot of us were sort of dumb bells that haven't been trained for it... [Laughter]

Cohen: [Laughter] There probably wasn't enough time...

Rung: Right. But my point is, no one does that now... they don't do it... you'll never be able to pull this off. If you didn't have, you know, everything is, "How many grades? How's your grades?" Grades, grades, grades.

Cohen: But it sounds like you made it up, you know?

Rung: Right. Right. Yeah. When I went to the college, they said, "You can come, but you have to make up two years of high school French." So, they brought a high school teacher into the campus at night to make up for all these GIs that needed--you know?

Cohen: To make up the previous classes?

Rung: Yeah. Right.

Cohen: So, stepping back a little bit, you said that you were sent to--I forget the name of the school in Virginia, the naval academy. So, how long did it take to learn how to use the diesel engine?

Rung: I think it was eight weeks. And all the time we were doing the training at the institute, it's on the Chesapeake Bay. So, the landing craft that one I showed you. The one at the top, the old one. We trained at that at night. So, it was wonderful. You're working with the diesels in the school but at night they put you on a landing craft with diesels, so, it was really... The training on Chesapeake Bay at night, though, was really bad because there were so many ships around. You know, you have these guys that don't know too much yet about ships.

Cohen: And there's a very [large] crowd and everyone is...

Rung: Yeah, yeah. Well, I'll give you one story. All right, if you don't mind.

Cohen: Yeah. Go ahead.

Rung: They decided... they decided we needed practice at night. Now, here is all these greenhorns in [Laughter]... so, we went out... I'll never forget it... We had a bow watch to make sure you didn't run into something... [Laughter] and we had reverse head communication. So, the skipper said to the bow watch, "You see anything ahead of us... you report it." "Yes, Sir. There's two lights," he said, "Are they close together?" He said, "Well, no." So, we kept going and going and the skipper said, "What do you think we should do?" Can't believe this guys did this. He said, "I think you outa go between them." So, the skipper says, "Well, okay." Now, the anchor in Chesapeake Bay is a cruiser and it's huge so there's a bowline on it. And there's a stern line on it. And we were heading straight for it. Now, that little thing hitting it the... [Laughter] It's maybe the best story the Navy ever had. But yeah. We avoided it. The young man realized something was... we weren't quite up to it. But when we slowed down, he said, "Skipper, you better cut the engines and see what's there" I'm sure my... the head of it, the skipper was... [Laughter] but I wonder if...those are valuable stories because, you know, life... is dangerous when you sail.

Cohen: And that was part of your training?

Rung: Yeah, and in the Pacific, for instance, we were loaded with heavy, big sails[?] - hundreds of them. When we were looking for the fleet, we needed... and...

we needed an escort because if you were to be torpedoed, the stuff we had on would have blown up other ships. So, we didn't have any escorts. So, we finally... we took the first... some of the first occupation troops to Hokkaido, Japan. Japan surrendered while we were out there.

Cohen: But between--after Virginia, were you sent to Europe?

Rung: Yes. Good question. After Richmond, they sent me to Pier Ninety Two in New York, and the liberty ships that were being built then... they were supply ships, alright. Liberties, right. They put me on the S.S. Robert Trumbull, which was a liberty. Now, the liberties was operated by the Merchant Marine. But the guns were operated by Navy. So, there's a three-inch fifty and a bow, and I three inch fifty ... was the third loader. [Laughter] The one in the bow. So, I got--and there was a hundred ships--and it was the north Atlantic in the winter and it's a wonder we didn't have more problems than we had, because at night, you know, that many ships, and liberties were rolling and rocking and...

Cohen: Were the liberties a relatively small ships?

Rung: No. They're big. It's... no, I don't have one right now, but it's like a carter ship. They put them... they build... endless numbers of them. They... because the German submarines were sinking ships all the time.

Cohen: Did you have to zig zag? Like, was there a concern of German submarines? Did your route have to zig zag?

Rung: No. But one thing we didn't have, we didn't have a good escort. We got a couple of small sea-going tugs. Escort means that... they were protection against submarines... we didn't have any destroyers or anything. All these ships...but we didn't have one mishap going over, no. I think it was probably the weather. You know. Yeah, it was so bad. If they didn't call general quarters, you know, here's the thing you're going to like -- we probably would have, the greenhorn would have probably shot into the ship. [Laughter]

Cohen: Were you seasick?

Rung: No, but I got really dizzy. I was on the bridge for something at night, and the moon came out, and all of a sudden, the moon's up here, and the moons in the water. It was magnificent. The skipper got after me because at the bridge and said, "How come you're standing back?" And I say, "I can't see. I'm trying to see through the..." it was sort of misty, you know... so, he told me, "Well, you better get off there." And I say, "Well, okay. I probably shouldn't say

anything. You're the boss." And then we got to London. I hope I'm not dragging... I was there for about... My ship wasn't there yet.

Cohen: So, where did your ship land on the bridge?

Rung: What they did was... that thing came in three pieces, and they put them on top of liberties--pieces. Then when they got to Europe--or London--they put it together. They bolted it together. So, now, you go one, two, three...

Cohen: So, the landing crafts were in pieces, and then when they got to London, they were assembled?

Rung: Yeah, so, when it came... I didn't know where it was. But I stayed at a British naval academy in London, and I didn't even know where we were going. So, all of a sudden, June the fifth--no, June the fourth--we're at the naval academy and they say, "You report to Plymouth on the coast to 539. That's your assignment." But I was... London was wonderful. It was terrible as far as the war, but I have great regard for the British. We got bombed every single night, and then they [the Germans] started to shoot B-1's [at London]. B-1s are flying bombs. No pilot. Like a kamikaze in Japan--the Japanese. But the other thing that came and has great implications--rockets. The Germans came up with the rockets. They claimed they went three-thousand miles an hour. That spitfire I showed you--they couldn't do nothing. So...they, because it was such a weapon that we had no defense against... they were launched from the Netherlands. You know, from the Netherlands, and its concentration was London. And they believed, the British believed that if they didn't get those sites--See, this shows you why the invasion was important too. We had to those rocket sights or London will disappear. And they started to evacuate the kids out of London.

Cohen: When you were there, and they were bombing with the rockets, would you go down to the tube, like everyone else?

Rung: That's a story in itself. I'll tell you another story. You're going to get it all, All right. [To Bill Seitz] Hey Bill! Go see your mother-in-law then come back, Okay? [Laughter] Yeah... I met a gal one night in London. Now, it's all blacked out. There's no lights in London except on the busses they put tape and left a little slit like this. So, on those big double-decker bus, all you saw were these... [Laughter] Yeah, well, I had been on liberty, I still didn't know where I was going. You know, this was before the orders. So, I was walking down the street and this gal was walking all by herself and she said, "Are you a Yank?" And I said, "Yeah, I'm with the Navy," and I said, "Can I do anything for you?" And she said, "Well, I'm all by myself." And I said, "Can I see you home?" She said, "Yes." So, there was the beginning of the relationship but one of the

things about this is I got to know a British family. You know, it wasn't elite to me. It was just... I'll just tell you one story. They get one egg a month. One egg, yeah. So, at any time I... while this is going on, [if] I got something, I would take it to the family. But... one night, we had bad rain, and I was there, and this was why I have great regard for the British. This gal's sister was married, and her husband was fighting with the 8th Army in North Africa against [German Gen. Erwin] Rommel. So, the sirens went off and this sister had a new baby and... I can't remember--little. We had to grab the baby, go downstairs in this cold... every ten minutes, continuously these people had to do this! I shouldn't tell you this. I said... I didn't know where this gal was that I knew and I was trying to do this. And my hand dropped on a knee and it was her sister and she was so cute she said, "She's on the other side." [Laughter] But the British anti-aircraft gun crew was just only little way down. They heard there was a Yank in the basement and said, "Ask the Yank if he wants to get up on this gun?" I said, "I don't know anything about your gun. You're defending the city. You fire the gun." So, what do you think of this story? One night we're there. We were chatting, you know, and her mother said to me, "Do you know that I heard that the Empire State Building was so high, and it sort of rolled in the wind, and you have big rollers on it and it goes." And I looked at her and said -- well, I loved her for telling me this story -- and said, "No. That's not true." I had a convertible, a picture I had a Packard convertible, and I had it in my pocket. And I showed it, and her mother said to me, "For us to have that kind of car, we'd have to have an awful lot of money." I paid about fifty bucks for it because the guy who owned it was drafted. [Laughter] But London, I really loved London. And you see, I've been back to Normandy twice. Yeah, for the fiftieth anniversary, you know. Then I went back with a group of--I used to take students to Europe after the war from Wheaton [College]. We had a seminar overseas, and we went to the Soviet Union and... but anyway. So, when I flew back; well, when I went back for the fiftieth, I was called and [they] said, "We are having a celebration, and we want someone from the American side to come fly over and be on a TV program." So, I said, "I've never done this." So, they flew me over, put me up in a hotel in Amsterdam, [Netherlands], and the next morning, they flew me to the beach where...

Cohen: From Amsterdam to...?

Rung: To Omaha.

Cohen: Omaha! So, by airplane?

Rung: Yeah... and they were going to shoot pictures. So, a crew, two guys were there with cameras. So, they took me back, they said, "Where did you... Can you show us where you landed?" I said, "If you show me the draws..." You

know, they had draws to try to get off the beach, meaning like an indentation. Okay. So, I said, "Yeah. If it's still there." So, it was still there. Right there. Anyway, that night, they taped the show and George Woods came up to me and said, "I'm George Woods. Where were you?" He says, "I landed with the 82nd." I wanted to hug him, yeah. [Laughter]. We never got together.

Cohen: During the war itself, first you were in London for a few weeks. At what point...?

Rung: Did we go over?

Cohen: Yes.

Rung: Okay. Yeah. Right. So, we're in London and I'm waiting for orders. I get the orders and the 539 was anchored in Plymouth. And I was in London and they transferred me from the naval institute to the landing craft on the fourth. And by the way... there was so much in the area in terms of military equipment in Britain that they said, "If we get anymore tanks and stuff, England is going to sink." You know? I saw all these tanks and stuff. So, I saw the fourth... the skipper, I met the skipper and there were eleven of us on the crew.

Cohen: Was this the landing craft...?

Rung: Tank. See... a landing craft tank and then that big one is the landing ship tank. Okay. So, I was on the 539 and... skipper said, "Tomorrow." Tomorrow will be the fifth, okay. "Tomorrow, gentleman, we take off for the coast." Now, he didn't say anything where because they were afraid that the Germans would find out where it was going to be. So, he said, "I need someone that will volunteer. That we'll put a rope around them, and he'll step off the ramp when we get there, and check the depth of the water." So, this guy couldn't wait to volunteer. [Laughter] It never happens but... he said, "I'll do it! I'll do it!" So, the morning of the fifth, the weather is impossible, it's raining, and it's blowing. And there's a storm over the English Channel. So, we start out... you know, this is the day we're supposed to do it, you know. And then [General] Ike Eisenhower says, "We can't land men in a surf this high on the beaches of France. So, I want them to turn around, and we'll wait twenty-four hours until the weather clears." And the weathermen kept checking the weather. "Is it going to clear? Is it going to clear?" Because we're trying to keep this a secret as best as we can. So... Oh, by the way, I have the ship's log, yeah. So, I'll give you the next part of the story. We waited twenty-four hours and it's still bad, but Ike [Dwight David "Ike" Eisenhower] Ikesaid,

apparently, "We can't wait any longer." So, on the sixth, we started to cross the channel.

Cohen: Is this in the morning?

Rung: One thing that not many people have mentioned but, they gave us an outfit-- a pair of jeans and a shirt, a long-sleeve shirt. And it was protective gear in case the Germans used gas.

Cohen: Oh, my.

Rung: Yeah. And the thing I thought it was, they might use fire. They'd set the beaches on fire, and we'd have to go through fire. So, you may not hear that from many other people. So, we're starting out and we're loaded. And the weather is so bad, not so much for me, but for the troops. Every guy on this landing craft is sick, and he's got to go fight in these beaches. [Laughter] So, we got there at 6:30, I think. It was just bedlam. There was firing everywhere. So, got in line, we got the beach, we drop the ramp, and that 88 [shell] went through the skipper's quarters. And it went through the crew's quarters, and it lodged in a locker. A locker, you know, and it was armor piercing, it wasn't for exploding. It was the drill hole, but they shot it too high. You know, if it had been below the water line, you have holes, oh, boy. [Laughter] So, we took two 88s and two 47s. Now, the young man who was going to jump off this thing, the skipper said, "Forget it. We'll drop the ramp and they'll get you right away." So, because there were bodies floating around in the water, already. See, the problem was not only because of the water... but the... equipment they were carrying. You know, they got all kinds of equipment and you are trying to get in ashore. You know, you might be over your head. That's the thing. So, we backed off and we tried three or four times.

Cohen: Pardon my ignorance, but what exactly was the job of your boat?

Rung: What am I doing?

Cohen: Yeah. What are you doing?

Rung: Yeah, okay. Rommel has sown--that German general--Rommel has sown two-million mines on the beaches, all right? So, that's important because the skipper said to me, he's up on the bridge, you know, that high point up there. He's up on the bridge and I'm down in the... by, not in the engine room, but he said, "Dick, don't go in the engine room unless I tell you because..." he said, "If you're in the engine room and we hit a mine, you're finished." So, I'm watching all of this. I didn't go down in the engine room. But I did try to look over the side and the skipper said to me, "Dick. Get down." [Laughter]

Oh, the thing about the crew was, on the way in... you know, the infantry had landed some, and a lot of them were dropped in too deep of water. So, they are just floating, and I'll never forget the skipper... there's a body in front of us and... one of the crew said, "Let me pick him up." He said, "We have to go in." So, we're trying to push him off. But that... he doesn't know this. But I never told him this, I don't think, do you know what the latest data is in *The Dead and Those Who Are About to Die*? That latest book? Twenty-thousand bullets and shells per minute were hitting the beaches. It was raining death. Absolutely raining death. So, I have every book that was... He helps me some. Not too often. [Reference to Seitz]. But this latest book is astounding. Okay, so, we don't land until about three in the afternoon. Now, the only thing that I think that saved us is two American destroyers, all right, took command of the beach, parallel to the beach because they couldn't get to the bunkers to having weapons blown out. So, those two destroyers came in and opened up and... when they got the bunkers, then they started to be successful going in. So, we spent two months on the beach because we couldn't take the channel ports. Cherbourg, La Hague. There was so much wreckage in the harbor, they couldn't bring the ships in. So, all of the supply ships are out here, and if they needed something, they'd contact us, see.

Cohen: So, you'd be staying still? You'd be staying in the ship? In the water and they'd come--

Rung: Yeah. Normandy was terrible. Really terrible. And that first ten, fifteen minutes of, *Saving Private Ryan*, that guy who was on that with me here, he said, "That was really good." And *The Longest Day* was a propaganda film, but *Saving Private Ryan* was... because, I don't know, it shows one shot where a guy is helping his buddy and he doesn't have any legs... So, anyway, after--for two months--we worked the ???? took it and all kinds of stuff. If they needed ammunition or something, they got it. And it's okay because [the Germans are] off the beaches at this point.

Cohen: How do you procure things? Let's say you needed more ammunition and there wasn't any on the ship, would you go back to England and...?

Rung: Yeah. All of these liberties, many of them are loaded with... certain kind of weapons. So, if we got a call, they'd say, "We need ammunition for .50 caliber machine guns." The ship that's got that, we'd get the number, and we'd find it.

Cohen: You'd locate it....

Rung: It's well done in that regard, and there's so much to tell you. You know, they tried to develop a wall because D plus seven... the worst storm in the history

of the English Channel hit us... and there's all these little boats. [Laughter]
But what they did is they floated these big concrete blocks over, sunk them in, off on Omaha, and we hid behind one of those when the storm hit. But we were almost sent back because there was so much equipment that got swallowed up under water... I went back to the States for a thirty-day leave...

Cohen: Was after the two weeks in Normandy?

Rung: Yeah. I don't go back to England, we go... they loaded us. Yeah, we got loaded on. This 539 is on top of it. Went back, and had a thirty-day leave. I reported to New Orleans, [Louisiana] and... now, I'm on the 309 because the 539 is on the deck. So, went through the canal--that shot is at Pearl Harbor--we hit Truk and Guam, and we had a little problem in the Philippines... and the Japanese surrendered.

Cohen: Okay. When you say you had a little problem in the Philippines, do you mean there's still fighting going on at that point?

Rung: Yeah. Sure. See, we had a load of big shells, and no one wanted to escort us. We were out all by ourselves because if you put that 309 in the middle of a convoy with all those shells and it gets torpedoed, you know, so... We had it on when we went to Japan, we still had all of those shells. And they unloaded them in Hokkaido, but they were putting them on big capital ships that had that kind of gun, but...

Cohen: So, what was your mission in the Pacific? Was it similar like there'd be a radio communication signal saying, "We need such and such," and you'd have to go to an island--?

Rung: Yeah. You see, the thing in the Pacific was... they would take us off the 309, all right, and we do on an island what we did at Omaha, because they had to retake all of these islands. The story of the landing craft is really the result of the Japanese in the beginning because they had invaded all of these islands and how are you going to get men and equipment back in?... I went to the museum in New Orleans, World War II, and there's a great big oil painting in the cafeteria, and it's Ike [Dwight David "Ike" Eisenhower, supreme commander of Allied Expeditionary Forces in World War II] and... oh, man, I lost it. Anyway, the outfit that did the... that made the smaller landing craft is pictured with Ike and Ike is thanking him because he's been given credit for winning the war by producing all these small boats.

Cohen: Did you have a chance to go on any of the Japanese islands when they were not hostile?

Rung: Yeah. The only island I was on, I was on Guam and we had a record of, believe it or not, a recreation island where if the guys could get... because it was so hot. We'd park outside of these islands and guys could get beer and cold drinks throughout the afternoon. [Chuckling] You're not going to believe this part. On one of those islands, the crew--the crew from the 539--we're all on in, and this guy meets some native. And he says, he has a monkey, a small monkey. So, one thing led to another, and the guy, my crew member, decided he was going to buy this monkey. And he took it back to the 309--and you're not supposed to have that... I'll tell you this last story about the monkey. I was on the watch on the stern, and a message... I watched the radar on the mass, and the radar stopped right off the... where I was, in other words, the stern. This monkey climbed up this staff... if you could imagine. By the way, I'm on this gun because the guy whose job was to watch the gun goes down for coffee and says, "Will you take my spot?" And I say, "I don't know anything about that gun." He says, "Oh, nothing will happen. You don't have to worry." And all of a sudden, this monkey is up there and nothing is happening on the radar, and he jumped. He landed right on me, and I almost fainted. I thought, you know. And we got rid of that monkey. We also had a dog we weren't supposed to have.

Seitz: What happened to the monkey?

Rung: [Laughter] The dog, you know the cushions on her feet, the tank go so hot that it would burn their feet. So, the skipper said, "You can't keep that dog." This was, though, in the Atlantic. He'd been all right, but you shouldn't have had him on the ship. If you want a bird or a parrot, go ahead, but... [Laughter] So, one last thing. When the war is over, I never knew any of this, the skipper said, "We have to get a broom. On the 309. We need a broom. The war is over. We're victorious." And they put the broom on top of the mast, you know. Here's the brush part, and it's sticking on top of this. You know what that is? A clean sweep. We did it. A clean sweep. It's over. You didn't know that did you?

Cohen: No, no. That's interesting. So, did you like the men you were with both in the Pacific and the Atlantic? Did people get along well?

Rung: Yeah, yeah, yeah... One thing that I always wished... when we got to Pearl...the Royal Hawaiian Hotel is a classy joint. I mean, it was something, and, you know, what the submarine crews got? They got a rest spot, and you know where they're resting? In the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. You know, I couldn't have even have touched that if I had the money. Oh, and Hawaiki Beach, is all barbed wire, you know, because of protection of the island. So, I was mustered out, I went back to Sampson. Yeah, I was mustered out of the Navy at Sampson.

Cohen: Oh, so you went back?

Rung: Yeah, back home.

Cohen: Where were you when you learned of VJ-Day and...?

Rung: I was in the Pacific when the Germans surrendered.

Cohen: And how did people...?

Rung: Oh, I shouldn't. I'll tell you... Isn't this amazing? You know, the Navy is... one problem with the service, it's another life unless you're used to what they want to do. When the European theater was over, and I never forgotten this, you know, the compass on a ship floats in alcohol and it had to be changed once in a while. So, they drained the alcohol out of the compass. And they're drinking this stuff, you know, you could go blind with this. A guy gave me that much and I said, "You guys are going to drink this?" They said, "Yeah." But of course, on the 539. [Laughter] See, you shouldn't have asked me during the interview. This is your fault. All right. There were two guys from...well, they said, "We're hillbillies. We're from Kentucky. We're hillbillies." And they give the impression that all they do in hillbilly country is drink moonshine. And make moonshine. So, they said, "Is there anything onboard that you can drink?" Well, there's vanilla, Paleo vanilla. They said, "We'll make some." We say, "How...where are you gonna ferment it?" "We'll put it under one of the bunks." Because they didn't want the skipper to know. So, they tried it. They called it, "razor jack." The dog got under there and he smelled it and--I don't think he touched it--but it was discovered that it wasn't as good as these guys thought.

Cohen: We, they tried.

Rung: So, in the Navy, I have hundreds of stories. I mean, I got... London was... I saw Winston Churchill once. One of those rockets almost cleared out a whole block. I hadn't been aboard a landing craft yet, but someone said, "You outta go see what happened last night." And Winston arrived, he's always saying, "We can do this. I know it's tough for you guys." But I didn't know who he was. I didn't... of course, I didn't know. Now, I would have gotten his autograph for you.

Seitz: Yeah, right.

Rung: Sure.

Cohen: That's interesting. When you were in the Pacific, were there any kamikaze attempts on your ship?

Rung: No. We never was attacked by Japanese in the aircraft. But that was pretty bad, Okinawa, you know, by this time... Okinawa was really bad as far as kamikazes. And that's amazing thing. Seeing that... and then after the war, the widows of the kamikaze pilots, you know, "We gave our men." So, I don't know if they ever go the money but I remember in the paper, there's a...

Cohen: There's an acknowledgement.

Rung: Yeah. And I said this too. I came out of the war... a pacifist. And I fought my last battle, all right. Unless they invade the United States, then I'd go anywhere. You know what? Ike Eisenhower, the commander of the European theater, came out the same place I did.

Cohen: You wrote down your thoughts, but I didn't totally understand it. Is the basic idea that the main thing is for people to live life and have good schools, to be fed, and to be taken care of and to...

Rung: Right. See, Ike said... How'd you like to make your decision... when to make the invasion? Wasn't that bad? I mean, that guy must have been really bad at that time, you know, when you had to make those. But Ike said, "It costs money." He said, "You know, if we had one bomber. One bomber would build so many schools in a small town." Yeah. My view. But I think... the human element is... he really lost it when he--all we talk about is weapons. Better weapons. Better weapons. Better weapons. And there's all these people are in need. Well, when are we going to have some people who stand up and say, "This is what we're going to do?" Now, I'm not asking to disarm but I'd at least cut the budget. Now, Ike, when he was president, didn't add anything to the military budget.

Cohen: When you were in the Navy, were you questioning the war then, too?

Rung: No. The biggest problem for me and changing my viewpoint was Omaha.

Cohen: Was Omaha.

Rung: You know, because, most of the... all of that shooting is going on, that book says most of the people that got killed were shot in head. Now, there's over nine-thousand bodies. I went back to the cemetery, and they have all these white roses, okay, and the Germans have it on the same site. The Germans--about 750,000 troops trying to protect themselves. So... for what? For what? So... I'm a peace maker.

Rung: You know, one of the questions in the questionnaire was whether you belong to any veteran organizations, and you put “no” with an exclamation mark. So, is that because you feel...?

Cohen: Yeah. I’m, well, I’m a member of Cantigny, you know, I’m a... But that’s because that’s the base for the 1st Division. You know, it’s the Big Red One, and we had some of the Big Red One aboard, but they were four guys that were part of a staff. By the way, they had gone through Italy, and you could tell they knew what they were doing. They went off the landing craft in two jeeps like... [Laughter] they’d shoot like that. But I... I just... Omaha really hit me. And as I said, I’ve always said this, “Omaha is not, is not seventy-four years ago. Sometimes, it’s yesterday.” It depends.

Cohen: Do you... what lesson would you like the younger generation to learn from your service?

Rung: Well, I think, and I’ve said this, I don’t want, I want to say to the next generation, “Don’t make the mistakes that your fathers made in regards to war.” Now, and here’s the end, all right. In 1919, at the Treaty of Versailles, the Germans were forced to sign that they were at fault for the war, all right. Now, if we hadn’t made--done that, I would not have landed at Omaha. You know why? Because they had lost their colonies, they had lost their army, and the inflation in Germany was terrible, all right. So, finally, if that’s the case. If we were to have treated the Germans more humanely at Versailles, Hitler... See, Hitler said, “We were sold down the river. We’re sold down the river.” All on the basis of Versailles.” [Indecipherable] They wanted their national respect back. So, the Germans said, “Yeah, yeah.” I find that all the time in Just some people, in the United States, you know

Cohen: Is this partly why you chose to study and then become a professor of political science and history...?

Rung: Yeah. I wanted to find out more about who I was historically. Poli Sci was, you know, the next thing. But I majored in history because I wanted to know who I was. And by the way, you are what you know. And the second thing is, if you are what you know, and this is the final thing, I’m not only in history, but you just found out, history is in me.

Cohen: That we carry it with us?

Rung: Yeah.

Cohen: You know, I feel like we're wrapping things up. But it sort of hit me that I forgot to ask you about the hole in the boat, and I don't even remember if it was in Europe or the Pacific. So, before finishing, would you like to talk about that? What had happened?

Rung: Yeah, you mean the shell? See, I didn't know... that shot... I was on the port side and that 88 went through the skipper's quarters. That was on the starboard side. Now, when the shell went through the two places and lodged in the locker, no one knew... I didn't even know it was there, see. But someone on the crew must have looked in there and saw this shell sticking in the... So, he must have, or maybe he pulled it out and dropped... but it could have gone off. But it wouldn't really because we know, we all know it was armor piercing. All right. So, they were going to drill a hole in us and when we would settle in the water, then they were going to have a turkey shoot. You know, we couldn't do anything. They'd take care of us when they got around to it because we were sitting in the water, so...

Cohen: And this was in Omaha or in the Pacific? When did this pull happen in the water as a result of the shell? Where was the ship at the time?

Rung: Right on the beach.

Cohen: At Omaha?

Rung: Yeah. Those things are tough. I... think about a lot. But it has to be certain things, you know.

Cohen: Okay. Do you have anything else you'd like to add or that you'd like to say right now before we end the interview?

Rung: No. I don't think so. What I want you to realize is that history is very important in our lives. Really important. And I never thought about it for a long time but my statement about it's [i.e. history] in me is highly significant. And by the way, all of the guys who are having trouble with, you know, is that problem. The history is in them, and they can't flush it out, you know. They can't flush it out. Impossible.

Cohen: Well, on behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum & Library, I thank you for the interview and of course, it goes without saying, for your service.