

# Ed Bales

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Interviewed by Leah Cohen

Transcribed by YouTube

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Leah Cohen: Today is August 25, 2020. My name is Leah Cohen and on behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, I have the pleasure of interviewing Lt. Edward Bales, the [US] Navy officer who served from 1956 to 1970 both in active duty and in the reserves. His service is emblematic of the Cold War, serving on the USS Beale near Cuba both during the Bay of Pigs<sup>2</sup> invasion and the Cuban Missile Crisis<sup>3</sup>. So welcome.

Ed Bales: Thanks Leah.

Cohen: So, we'll begin at the beginning, and I'll say, -where and when were you born?

Bales: I was born in Chicago. I lived and grew up in the north side of Chicago, in Edgewater. The house—I was born in 1939—they bought the house in 1940 and it was 1448 West Glenlake [Avenue]. My mom grew up at 1408 Glenlake, so we grew up about eight houses down from where my mother grew up, in St Gertrude's Parish. She went to Saint Gertrude's grammar school [Catholic school] and graduated in 1926. I graduated in 1952; my wife Barbara graduated from St Gertrude's in 1954. The whole family was right there.

Cohen: Yeah, it sounds like a like a closely knit community.

Bales: [Laughs] Yeah it was. The old neighborhood where everybody watched out for everybody else. The block had a bunch of kids and I always said if I ever did something at one end of the block, my mother would know about it before I got home, and if I did something at school and the nuns got mad at me, then it was worse getting home than it was from the nuns. So we were very close family; I have two sisters and we're still very close.

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<sup>1</sup> Ed Bales edited this interview to facilitate readability after reviewing the initial near verbatim transcript but has not changed the content.

<sup>2</sup> US attempt to invade Cuba in 1961, using exiled Battista loyalists and the CIA. Notorious for its ineptitude and for newsreel scenes of the captured coup plotters. Preempted the Cuban Missile Crisis (see below).

<sup>3</sup> Also known as the October Crisis of 1962. Defining Cold War moment when the USSR deployed ballistic missiles to Cuba and the US response. Perhaps the closest the world has come to the brink of all-out nuclear war.

Cohen: Wow! What were your interests or activities as a child a teenager?

Bales: I always liked fixing things. I liked working on cars, working on my dad's car with him. That's why my folks encouraged me to go into engineering. I like math, I like science and physics. I went to St George High School; had to take Latin, which I wasn't very good, but I liked physics and all the science classes and math. I got a naval scholarship to Illinois Institute of Technology [IIT] so the Navy put me through college. And each summer as a midshipman I would go. The first [time between my freshman and sophomore year, I was on the Battleship [USS] *Wisconsin*. We went down through the Panama Canal, to Chile and then back through the Canal into the Atlantic and that was exciting. And then the second [time], between my sophomore and junior year I went to Corpus Christi, Texas to the naval air station there. We got to fly in fighter jets and multi-engine planes and learn a lot about naval Aviation.

The second half of that summer I went to Little Creek, Virginia and they gave us Marine training. I decided I didn't want to be a Marine, because they're down in the mud and climbing stuff. But we got to, you know we went off the ships into the Higgins boats and we did landings and all kinds of stuff like that. I was dating my future wife through college, and I told Barbara "I want to be a Navy pilot." She didn't think that was a good idea because it's too dangerous. So then, in the final year I went to San Diego, and I was on a destroyer in the Pacific That experience helped me select Destroyers for my duty station.

Cohen: So, so stepping back a little bit, what made you interested in the Navy, in particular, and did you have any family members who had served?

Bales: Yeah, well I look at pictures of me being eight nine ten years old and my folks always dressed me in a Navy uniform. But my uncle Harry, my mom's oldest brother, was a midshipman at the Naval Academy in the 1920s. My mom was pushing me when I was taking the different exams for scholarships. She's the one that told me to take the navy scholarship exam which I passed and won the scholarship. I *loved* the Navy. After I was commissioned an ensign, I went to Glencoe, Georgia for, it was a five-month program for Combat Information Center [CIC] officer training, and that's the CIC, [which] is, you know, the brains of the ships. It's always there.

We got married that November and she came down to Glynco. Then in January 1961, we went to Norfolk and uh, where I was to join the USS Beale (DDE 471). We got to Norfolk on a Saturday, found a place to live on Sunday and the ship left on Monday so she was there all alone [laughs]! We loved the Navy; we still have Navy friends but, you know I go back, and I look at the letters in those days. We didn't have cell phones, or you know satellite phones or anything; the only

way we could communicate is by letter. We kept the letters, and it was obvious the letters would talk about what I was doing, but it was obvious that I didn't like being away from her, so that's main reason I got ... I left active duty. I had to choose the Navy or Barbara and I chose Barbara [laughs] It was a good choice.

Cohen: Yeah. I was wondering, how did growing up in the Cold War affect you? Like did you have a sense of it being a looming threat?

Bales: Well, I remember well during the war [i.e., WW2], because I was what the three, four, five years old ... I was six years old when the war ended. I remember my folks—you know everything was rationed; my dad was a salesman, he couldn't buy tires for the car ... and I remember when, the VJ [Victory Over Japan] Day, oh actually it was VE [Victory in Europe] Day, it was May 8<sup>th</sup> or May 9<sup>th</sup>, when Germany surrendered. All the neighbors are out, cheering and everything else. I couldn't figure out what all the cheering was about I do remember during the Cold War and, in school and then well really in elementary school, the ... tests we would have: we'd have to get under the desks in case of a nuclear war, the sirens went on and stuff like that. And but other than that, you know the kids in high school, we really didn't do those drills and stuff. I read about it, but in the 1950s, with 1952 to 1956, I was in high school and that was kind of a ... you know, just something to read about in the paper.

Cohen: Yeah. So you mentioned, um, that your mother encouraged you. [That you] applied for the naval scholarship and you began to study engineering at the Illinois institute of Technology. So, what did you decide to focus on?

Bales: Well, I really wanted it; it was interesting. The first two years of college it's kind of general math and science and so forth. The last two years, I was really focusing on communication systems and so forth and the theory of communications as an engineer. And it's interesting because when I went onboard ship, my first duty was electronics officer. People said that generally doesn't happen, but it worked out for me, and the electronic technicians taught me a lot on board ship. And then I became the CAC [Combat Information Center] officer, then an officer of the deck [OOD]. I was also the OI division officer And our division was all the radar men, the CIC, and the electronics technicians and so forth.

Cohen: So, was the electronics technology very cutting edge at the time, like a whole new technology?

Bales: Well, we were part of Task Group Alpha, which was set up to develop a new and advanced [anti-submarine warfare tactics. And so all the seven ships in the squadron were all modified]. They were World War II Fletcher-class destroyers, but heavily modified. We had the latest sonar that was available anywhere in the

world; we had the latest radar that was available anywhere in the world. We had a special anti-submarine weapons they called ASROCs, anti-submarine rockets, replacing the guns., We had torpedoes that could fire at submarines we had Hedgehogs<sup>4</sup> and things like that. And so the ship, everything we had on board ship was very advanced for that time. You know today it's *all* obsolete. We were ... the electronics we had on board was about the leading edge of everything,

Cohen: Was the sonar connected to, uh, the SOSUS<sup>5</sup> system?

Bales: Well, no, SOSUS was a totally separate system set-up actually in the 1950s, when SOSUS is very exciting. So, SOSUS stands for Sound Surveillance System. There were microphone sensors north of England. In England, there's a listening post but they actually were laid on the floor along the Atlantic Coast. We had them down to Florida; we had them over on the Pacific Coast up through the Aleutians, wherever Russian submarines could be, and they would be listening. It really was very, very sophisticated for the time. And any time a Russian submarine would come out of the North Sea or up there, we and our Allies would track them. I mean the SOSUS would know they're coming in. We could identify each submarine [whether it was or was not from the] United States. You know any of the submarines, has its own noise signature and a submarine moving through the water, even though it's quiet, it still creates noise with the waves and leaves a wake, and so the SOSUS could pick up the noise.

Especially, remember early on all the submarines were diesel and electric boats and they were very noisy: the propellers were noisy and the driving turbines and stuff like that were noisy. And but today, uh, with the nuclear subs, they are extremely quiet. The United States totally redesigned the propellers on submarines, because propellers as they're turning create, you know, turbulence in the water. Well, in fact, it was about ten years ago, one of the spies, uh, spies for Russia that was arrested in the United States, was arrested because they had stolen the design of submarine propellers to make them much more quiet and less turbulent and now today the SOSUS is still operational, but as I said, it's been, it's being replaced by a new system called TRAPS [sic], TRAPS: [Transformational Reliable Acoustic Path System]. Well one of the problems with SOSUS, it couldn't ... they had to learn to differentiate between whales and fish and all the regular noises that we see in submarine noises and so there was a lot of that but we, uh the new ones, the new TRAPS is, actually it's based on a walrus' whisker! A walrus has all these whiskers and we found out that the tip of the walrus' whisker picks up turbulence in the water because any animal going

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<sup>4</sup> An Anti-Submarine Projector invented in WW2; called a 'Hedgehog' because it projects out spines like that small mammal does to ward off its enemy.

<sup>5</sup> SOSUS: Sound Surveillance System, a passive sonar system developed by the United States Navy to track Soviet submarines.

by obviously leaves a vortex but the walrus, or the whiskers, picks up ... it's so sensitive, it can pick up that different ... that walrus can actually follow another animal that it's going after, based on the wake that lays behind as it moves through the water. But so I mean that it's that is an interesting thing, but the TRAPS system that is just coming online in the last few years, is much more advanced than SOSUS and also with all the electronic—the ability of our computers, you know, to differentiate sounds and select sounds and so forth because now they're focusing on not listening but *sensing* movement in the water, sensing, because the new subs, especially the nuclear subs, are very quiet.

Cohen: Well, tell me—

Bales: Well, I tend to wander a little bit, but I'll tell you, a submarine is absolutely the ultimate weapon, because it is, uh you know, especially the newer ones, we used Task Group Alpha, the seven destroyers and the aircraft carrier the *Randolph* anytime a new nuclear sub would come out or anytime. Remember back then the ballistic missile subs would have a gold and a blue and a gold uh, crew. They'd be on there for six months at a time and so when they would change crews, they would come out and we would spend a week or two out in the Atlantic [Ocean] or down in the Caribbean practicing with the subs and we would try to find them and they would not have to come up and be, you know, not found and I tell you that we would do weeks' worth of exercises with two subs maybe coming from different directions. We kind of knew where they were coming from, but anytime that we would tell them, and there's an underwater telephone called 'Gertrude' because sound travels in water, so we could talk to, we can actually talk to the submarine underwater.

Yeah, and so when we would finish the exercise, the submarines would disappear because in the ocean there's temperature layers; they could be, you know, 500 [or] a thousand feet or every, you know ... down to 3000 feet And temperature bends the sound wave, so if you were if a sub—we were listening to a sub and you could hear the noise, it would be bent several times coming up so you couldn't really tell, you know—it would look on sonar like the sub was *here* when actually it was over there, because [of] the sound wave [fluctuating] so many times. So every day we would lower sensors down into the water to find out what the temperature was so we could try to estimate, uh, where the thermal changes were so that we could kind of estimate, using mechanical computers to estimate, to smooth out where the sound wave is based on, that we knew where the temperature was. But one of my favorite...like we were we were with these two submarines for a week's exercise, and we did find the one; we never found the second submarine, and so at a certain when the exercise was open or over and all of a sudden, around the [USS] *Randolph*, the aircraft carrier, all these flares came shooting out of the water and the submarine had

stayed under the aircraft carrier for the entire week! And the thing is, because the surface ship makes so much noise in the water, that anytime that you know, you would listen over there, it would just be a big blob in the sonar and the submarine was able to stay like 100 feet below that, and we could never see him because the noise in the water from the *Randolph*, the aircraft carrier, was so great, it just blocked any echoes from the submarine. And so I mean, [subs are] the ultimate weapon, and now even the newest subs, the newest attack subs are even putting, uh a coating on them that is like, the planes that we have—that are like the B1 or B2, and the Stealth—they actually coat the new subs with a stealthy material that sonar waves are absorbed [by]. So, they are they're more stealthy today than [they have] ever been before.

Cohen: Incredible! [Laughter] A colleague was explaining to me that during the Cold War, the Russian subs were, relatively speaking, noisier than the US ones. Was this because, as you mentioned before, that the propeller was functionally different?

Bales: Propeller has a lot to do with it, and also the ... but remember during that time, we had just the [USS] *Nautilus*, [which] was America's first nuclear submarine and we were way ahead. They had no [Admiral Hyman G.] Rickover<sup>6</sup>, you know and that was nuclear power. We were years and years ahead of Russia with nuclear power for our surface ships and our submarines Their subs were almost all diesel-electric ... they have to come up to surface to recharge their batteries, because that's the one thing and also to scrub the air that they have in the sub. The nuclear subs have a much better air scrubbing system. One of the vulnerabilities of a diesel-electric [sub] is that it is inherently more noisy, It's very noisy because you have diesel generators charging the batteries, and then when submerged they're strictly on batteries, when they're quieter. Then it's mainly the screws, yeah, the propeller creates a lot [of noise] and also the shape, the shape of the submarine. You notice that the nuclear subs are shaped like a whale. that was the other thing the World War II subs, remember, had a pointed nose because it's thought that that would cut through the water better

Well, they found out that, because a blunt nose like a whale has allows the water to flow around it much differently than if you have a pointed nose, so that's why all the subs you see today have round bow not a pointed bow. I also mentioned that the subs, the Russian subs, during the Second World War, and even you know, during the Cold War, they were still built for the North Atlantic [ocean], because that's where they were during the [Second World] War. They would come out; the German subs especially stay in the North Atlantic and that water is very cold. Well, when they went down to Cuba, you know, during the Cuban quarantine, Cuban Missile Crisis, uh, their systems, their air-cooling systems,

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<sup>6</sup> Rickover has been credited as the "Father of the Nuclear [US] Navy."

could not handle the warmer water, because the water may be like thirty or forty degrees warmer down in the Caribbean than the North Atlantic. Their systems could not adjust to, not counter the thirty degrees, the warmer water outside, and also the air scrubbing systems required in that heat did not ... that's what broke down. That they were very inefficient and couldn't really operate in the Caribbean or the southern waters of the ocean. That was another reputation that the Russians had.

Cohen: This is fascinating. Just to jump back a little bit. You mentioned that once you're accepted a naval scholarship to Illinois Institute of Technology you were studying engineering, you were also going on missions during the summers like you mentioned, you know. So, was that part of NROTC [Naval Reserve Officers' Training Corps]? Like, what was the framework?

Bales: The Naval ROTC scholarship had regular members and then then someone could volunteer. The regular members, like myself, every summer we went on these cruises, and I loved ... in fact, I have some fantastic pictures of the battleship *Wisconsin*. This was the last battleship built. It's the BB-64 in the same class as the [USS] *Iowa*, *Missouri* and *New Jersey* and *Wisconsin*: the four battleships ... And the *Missouri* is where the Japanese signed—

Cohen: - the surrender.

Bales: Yeah, and today, the *Wisconsin* is in Norfolk [naval base], The *Missouri* is over in Hawaii, right by the [USS] *Arizona* memorial<sup>7</sup>, so you have the *Arizona*, and they have the ... where the Japanese signed, And I don't know where the *New Jersey* and the *Iowa* are, but they're beautiful ships, they're big ships when I went on, which was the first time—It was 1957—they had been air-conditioned. During the war and even up into the 1950s, the ships were not air conditioned, so if you were down in [the hull] ... the air conditioning hadn't really been applied. My second captain of the Beale Commander Robert Loomis, a magnificent [man] -- had been on board a destroyer all through the Second World War. In fact, half of our crew had been in the Second World War, because remember this was in the 1960s and they were, you know, career guys [military]. The stories they would tell! Fred Lawrence, our gunnery officer, was on a cruiser that got sunk and he was in the water for a couple days during the Second World War. Captain Loomis was involved in the invasions of Okinawa and Iwo Jima and those types of things. So, wonderful stories...

But I always thought about—before the ship was air conditioned—but if you're in some place where it's 100 degrees, it's 100 degrees inside the ship [laughs] because the metal walls are very, very hot.

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<sup>7</sup> Memorial for the carrier *Arizona*, which was sunk during the Pearl Harbor attack, Dec 7, 1941.

Cohen: So, this was during the summertime. There would be these, these missions ...

Bales: I'd go on the cruises.

Cohen: So, after you graduated, what was your rank and were you at that point assigned to the USS *Beale*? Like what happens next?

Bales: I was a commissioned an ensign, which is the first line officer rank. It's like a second lieutenant in the [US] Marines, or the [US] Army, being an ensign. So I was the commissioned an ensign and I received my orders which were assigned to the USS *Beale* at that time because I had requested a destroyer out of Mayport, Florida but they put me on the [USS] *Beale* out of Norfolk, which is fine. I was delayed getting to the *Beale*, because they sent me to CIC [Combat Information Center] school, Glencoe, Georgia and that was from then until right after the first of the year, 1961. So, I was down in Glencoe for that school which was ... I loved it. So, then I went on board, like January 7th or something, 1961.

Cohen: So, what did you learn at the uh, at the Combat Information Center school? What were you being trained to do?

Bales: Okay, what we're trying to do first of all ... the CIC is where all the information from the radar, but we had all the radar information: any aircraft, any sightings we ... that's where the any kind of battle, in any kind of direction, that's where the navigation is done from. If we want to get from point A to point B, you know, we have all these plotters, and you would plot the courses and so forth. And that CIC and then the navigation, the navigation business, the navigator would also determine where we were. And our whole responsibility was to constantly track where the ship was at all times. We had in the CIC, we had big plotting tables and all kinds of equipment, and the radar screens were all there and, uh we had plotters and so forth that would keep track where everything was going on. It was really the ... it's called Combat Information Center, because that's where all the information comes to, to provide [for] fighting the ship.

Cohen: So, you mentioned that you married your high school sweetheart at that point. How did it work did they give you like a two-week vacation?

Bales: Barbara was sixteen, I was seventeen, when we met. We have never been with anybody else, but so, four years later, the day before I left for Georgia, I asked her to marry me and became engaged, and we were. I flew home on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving in 1960 and then Thursday was Thanksgiving Day; Friday was the day before the wedding, we had the dinner and so forth. And we got married on that Saturday the 26th of November and then on Sunday, flew back to Glencoe, Georgia. Barbara had never been on an airplane and that



was her first [time] and we rented a little hotel, well—like a kitchenette back then, in Saint Simon's Island which is right there. And then so we got there on Sunday, we flew there on Sunday and then Monday morning, I left, went back to school and then but I was home each night and I had weekends free and then we came home for Christmas. The two of us drove home for Christmas then drove back and then the school was over, like January 6<sup>th</sup>, the 5<sup>th</sup> or whatever it was and then we drove up to Norfolk and I reported to the ship.

Cohen: So, sorry, where did your wife live when you were ... after you went to Norfolk?

Bales: Oh, we lived on East Little Creek Drive. We had we rented a little tiny house in Norfolk. Crummy little house [laughs] but we had no furniture, we had no nothing, but the house was furnished. We made it and we painted it all, made it into a house that you know, a *home*. And we had ... uh, and so I'd would go out to sea. Now, the second summer I was gone for three-four months and so she actually came home, back to Chicago and stayed with her family, because she didn't want to stay alone in Norfolk, but most of the time we'd be out on exercises two or three weeks out and a weekend and so I was gone about, I'd say over average, about half the time.

Cohen: Were the exercises like mostly in the Atlantic, not far from Virginia or do they range much further than that?

Bales: We would normally, uh, we did a lot of our exercises down in the Caribbean because the uh, the water was clearer and it was just less stormy because destroyers, you know ... we [had] some very, very serious storms. We'd be taking forty-degree rolls and I remember tying myself in the bunk, because you would be thrown out of your bunk at night and the ships would, we'd be taking green water over the bow and stuff. But, um, no it was ... we liked the Caribbean; we went into Guantanamo Bay, several times. We were going through Guantanamo Bay you know, going there to revisit, get water or get fuel and stuff like that. At sea, we always have uh these big tankers that would come along and fuel us or the Aircraft Carrier fuels, we would need their fuel about once a week when we were out there using oil. But it was exciting, it was an exciting time.

Cohen: You know, I was reading that the USS *Beale* was first called a DD [Destroyer], like a destroyer, and then became DDE [Destroyer Escort], an anti-submarine destroyer. was this, um, a result of the changes you talked about earlier where the World War II ships were updated with contemporary radar and sonar?

Bales: Right. Yeah, the ship, the [USS] *Beale* was, it was commissioned in 1943 as a DD. It was DD 471, and then in the 1950s is when they decided to develop this Task Group Alpha. So, it was one of the ships that received major, you know these major modifications and then they changed it to a DDE which, uh, you know,

during the war there was a DE which is a destroyer escort, which was a much smaller destroyer and so forth. Well, they made this a DDE because it was still large, so rather than the destroyer escort, we were an *escort destroyer*. So, but then there was DDE, because of the modifications to the ship to make it strictly modified extensively for anti-submarine warfare.

Cohen: Okay, so what was your MOS [Military Occupation Specialty code] while you're on the USS Spiel at that time?

Bales: Well I guess MOS is really for enlisted [personnel]. You know as ensign and later lieutenant JG (junior grade). I still remember my, you know my serial number 638498/1100 was my number, but officers really don't have an MOS, I guess, the specialty would be electronics and CIC [Combat Information Center], but uh, we're not— the enlisted men have more of an MOS, a specific designator for what they're in, whereas an officer is just an officer.

Cohen: So, here I'll just put it in very general terms: what was the nature of your responsibility? What did a typical day look like?

Bales: Well, first of all, we always stood watch, you know, driving the ship; up on the bridge of the ship. So, I started out as a junior officer of the deck because they're the ... well, the captain is his total, is the ultimate responsibility. And the captain's cabin where he sleeps, and stuff is right behind the bridge. He's always available any time of day, but then you have the officer that's in charge of the ship, When the captain's not on the bridge, just called the officer the deck and I was in junior office of the deck for about a year. We would stand watches every four hours, you know, every four hours you're on watch and around the clock. And so, I did one day; I'd have the eight to twelve watch and then the next day, I'd have the 12 to 16:00 [hours] watch or the four o'clock watch and there were 16:00, 18:00, 18:00 and 20:00 that that one was split because of dinner so you go from four to six and six to eight, then there is eight to midnight watch and so forth and so every day you'll be at the next watch, and so you were doing that., two watches a day.

And the other times, I was electronics officer. We were maintaining ... I had a crew of eight electronic technicians reporting to me and they're responsible for maintaining all the electronics on the ship, and so that was a constant. Either preventative maintenance, we were always maintaining them or if something broke, or they'd be up there repairing a radar antenna and so forth. So all the electronics were the responsibility of my team, the electronic technicians and myself. And I guess it was easier for me because I was an electrical engineer and so I understood most of what was going on which for many others was not the case. And then I became officer of the deck, so I was responsible, and I had a junior officer deck reporting to me. You have to ... I would say, January ...

January, probably about it. It was probably nine months as a junior officer, that then they became officers on deck and there were four of us officers. So, there'd be always, you know ... on the watches rotating around and then I became CIC officer, and a new officer came on board and replaced me as electronics officer. And so, it's funny that the officer replaced me, Jim Breuss, he was a history major, and he replaced me— electronics—but he married my sister! [laughs] My younger sister, they used to come out to Norfolk to see Barbara and me and after he got out of the Navy. He ended up marrying Loretto, my younger sister. [Laughter]

A typical day would be: first of all, you always had roll call and then the plan of the day, the POD. You know what was going on; we were just cruising, or if we were in the middle of an exercise or if we're on, like when we were in down the Bay of Pigs, when we were in the Cuban Missile Crisis, we were really at uh ... we worked at general quarters and in general quarters, you're on all the time. But we were on what's called *port and starboard watches*. Rather than having a watch every four hours, we would be on watch for four hours, off for four hours and then back on. In other words, we were always on, it was four hours, four hours so there was ... we'd go from four uh, four watch groups to two watch groups because we had to have some of the officers during those times, like the damage control officer couldn't stand watch because he had to be—you know, if there's any damage to the ship, if we did get attacked or something like that. So there are certain officers that were no longer able to stand watch so the other ones would stand watch: we'd have to double up for that. And that's how a normal day would be there Otherwise I would be in CIC. When I wasn't on officer of the deck watch, I would be down in CIC with the radar men and plotting the ship and just keeping busy or keeping logs and so forth. So, you're always busy. There's always something to do aboard.

Cohen: So, you had written to me a little bit about 'pinwheeling' as one of the tactics with the surface boats: circling around or twirling around and acting like a submarine. So would you like to talk about that and some of the other tactics that the Task Group Alpha Anti-submarine Squadron 28 used?

Bales: You're just generally be steaming. You'd have the Randolph, [which is] the aircraft carrier [that] would be in the center and you have a screen of ships in a circle around the carrier. If they were listening or pinging towards the aircraft carrier, they couldn't see anything past that. So the ships on the other side would be you know, focusing on that way so we would have full coverage all around and behind. And so we are always, *always* on sonar watch. Well, when we were doing exercises but even then, we were always, we were always looking for any kind of planes or other ships or things like that. And the other thing is, it's amazing the ocean is huge but, you know if we were going through a shipping lane, going from Norfolk down into, you know, around Cuba and so forth, there's

a lot of shipping lanes through there and if you've paid any attention the last two years, there's been a couple very serious collisions between destroyers and cargo ships and tankers and stuff like that, where sailors have been killed. So you always have to be watchful for other ships. And we always have lookouts also outside doing visual search. But you just have to concentrate all the time on the radar on both on the bridge and down in CIC, everybody's looking to see, to make sure that nothing, nothing misses [their sight] ... and as soon as we would get a contact, we would signal the other ships to make sure that they had the same contact. And a lot of times if we were under radio silence, because you know the radio can be picked up by other ships they just use a flashing light, you know they ... semaphore, called you know ... they would signal Morse Code and so forth, and or [use] flags. During the day, they [use] signal flags, so a lot and those things are still being used between ships because anytime there's a transmission, someone can pick it up, [someone] that you don't want to hear it. So, they're still using the old-fashioned flashing lights and the flags between the ships and the signalmen to make sure that everybody knows what's going on.

Cohen: It's wild— [laughs]

Bales: [Laughs] It was one, one of the most fun. The aircraft carrier had several different kinds of planes. They didn't have a lot of jets, because it was set up for anti-submarine warfare so they had multi-engine planes that would take off. They would search for submarines, you know, on the surface or under dropping sonobuoys<sup>8</sup>, a lot of helicopters and those types of things. But we would, we did join up with a couple other squadrons a few times where they had the big carriers—you know, the super carriers: the [USS] *Forrestal*, ah the [USS] *Saratoga* and the [USS] *Constitution*. So much, it was so much fun. When we'd be at nighttime, you'd be up in the bridge, and you can see these jets taking off of these the aircraft carriers and then you see the big gold balls of the jet exhaust coming off. You see this plane just taking off. It was amazing and we'd be a couple times ... in fact, I have pictures, where we'd be right along the aircraft carrier and we would be, uh they'd be refueling us. So, then it's very careful; you have to be careful because the ship can be sucked in and [the ships might] hit each other, so you have these hoses coming from the aircraft carrier to the ship to our ship and the other ships. But while we're there, they're doing flight operations so we were right below, and I was watching the planes that would be catapulting off. A lot of noise. A lot of busy stuff, a lot of stuff going on.

Cohen: This is cool. [41:01] So, you're on the USS *Beale* for just about four months and all of a sudden, um there's the ... there's the Bay of Pigs invasion, April 17<sup>th</sup>. Had

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<sup>8</sup> A device used to detect submarines, ejected from planes or ships. The word is a portmanteau of 'sonar' and 'buoy'.

you or other people known about the invasion beforehand? Like what type of information was available to you?

Bales: No, we knew nothing about it. We had been down, probably off Florida, working on submarine exercise, ASW [Anti-Submarine Warfare] exercise, and we were actually heading home towards Norfolk. And so then we, we just got—and I was the cryptographic officer, top secret cryptographic officer—so we would get messages on a crypto-machine, and I would decode them and take them to the captain. And there was, you know, I remember this one message is: “Reverse course”, you know, “One-eight-zero degrees] head down” ... all this was that we're heading down towards Cuba, and so we had no idea what was going on. But the whole task force turned around, then we headed down towards Cuba and while we're going down there, we did receive some information that we were going to support an invasion of Cuba. That's all we knew. The [USS] *Bache* [which] was a sister ship of our ship: the *Bache* was DD 470, and we have 471. And on the way down they painted out the [number] 4, I remember seeing over. looking over the *Bache* and the deck hands were on the side of the ship painting out the 4, you know, hanging over on a platform painting out the 4. Our guys are doing the same thing: we're saying, “Why on earth [are] they are painting out the 4, um with gray?”, They were making it look just like part of the ship. So then we were, we learned well, as a CIC officer—well, no that time I was just an electronics officer—and we learned that while we were going down to support ships that were bringing Cuban [counter] revolutionaries, uh to Cuba for an invasion and we didn't want to be identified as American ships. So that's 71 and 70, 71, [naval identification numbers that] didn't exist anywhere in the world, but at least they weren't American ships, supposedly. So, it was kind of silly and then as I said in my paper, we also took the *America*—we still flung the American flag, but it was so dirty you couldn't make it out, that it was American,

And we went down to [where] they were, it was just the *Bache* and the *Beale* and we went down to Nicaragua and, uh well we were down in that direction and we picked up one of the merchant ships that had been hired by the CIA, [which] was the *Sam Houston* and there were four—you learned later, you know all the research, there were four of them. But remember we were with the *Bache* and the *Bache* was on one side; we'd be on the other side with this this dingy old merchant ship, and with binoculars you could see all of these guys. We can see the decks were just loaded with the guys in green fatigues, obviously Cubans, um, heading north toward Cuba and we really, we still didn't know. Now the captain may have known, the captain, the executive officer, but at that time we didn't have any clue what was going on. But we did find out later that we were going to, you know, escort them. The reason for the escorts is that we wanted to keep any other ships away which might be trying to stop these four merchant ships with the Cuban invaders. So, then we stopped. We could see Cuba and we, the *Bache* and the *Beale* stopped, and the *Sam Houston* went in,

and you see, going all the way into the beach. We also had a couple of guys go in off the *Beale* on one of the rubber rafts and so forth and they were to be advisors.

But, uh, well, then you know the whole thing was so ridiculous that well then, since I was still the junior officer, I'd been on board four months. I was, I remember being up in the bridge and I was copying all of the air traffic between the USS *Essex*, which was a modified World War II aircraft carrier, and the jets flying off it, and so it was all the air traffic and as I said, I would just remember the pilots calling back to the *Essex*, saying, they were flying over the beaches. We had the American planes flying over the beaches where the [counter]revolutionaries were landing and, uh, Brigade 2506<sup>9</sup>, that's what it was, and our pilots kept saying—you know, they could see [Fidel] Castro's army and the tanks and stuff coming down and the pilots kept saying, "...they're going to get wiped out. We gotta fire on them" and they kept calling back to the *Essex* that they needed permission to fire, take out these things and that's what I said—that you know, [it] never came. Washington never gave, *permission* to fire on them. Our jets were flying over the beaches and describing everything that was going on there: the slaughter and the, you know ... and so it uh really, it really was a total mess. The whole thing was such a ridiculous mess.

Cohen: That's just ...

Bales: Go ahead ...

Cohen: Just so I understand properly: that the *Sam Houston*, the merchant ship carrying the Brigade 2506 had already landed at the beach, at the Bay of Pigs, I assumed that the USS *Beale* was nearby. You're involved in the communication work. It sounds like the USS *Essex* was also close by, and our pilots were viewing the situation on land and wanting to bomb but they were not given permission by [President] Kennedy. Is that correct?

Bales: Yeah. Our planes were from the *Essex*—part of another whole task group. We were the only two from our squadron that were there because we escorted the *Sam Huston*. The jets from the *Essex* were flying over the beaches. They were all there armed and they were ready to, uh take out the tanks and the trucks and so forth and that's the permission that was never given to fire. The [counter]revolutionaries had some planes, that they had bombed Castro's air force, but they missed a lot of planes and uh, so those planes, as *Sam Houston* and the other merchant ships came in, *Sam Houston* got bombed and sunk right, you know, right in the harbor. Well, then it turns out that the CIA. the *Sam*

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<sup>9</sup> Brigade 2506 was comprised of a CIA- backed group of Cuban exiles who attempted to overthrow the Cuban government under Fidel Castro, during the Bay of Pigs Invasion landings in Cuba on 17 April 1961.

*Houston* carrying all of the supplies for the landing: all the ammunition, all the medical supplies, all the food, and so forth .... You never put it on one ship, because then it gets sunk ... well, it was all in that one ship and so there was absolutely no supplies to provide for the people who are—the Brigade 2506—at the landing.

The landing was—we could see the landing, ah, wasn't during the day, which I mean, [it was] during the night. It was early morning, and we were seeing lights and fires, shooting, stuff going on. But that was never done ever during the Second World War: all landings were during the day.

Cohen: What do you think the rationale was to do the invasion at night.

Bales: Well, the CIA thought it would be, uh you know we ... they wouldn't see them coming. Well but, when you're landing you can't see where the beaches are. You can't see where any of the impediments are. You can't see -- there's no air cover during the night. You know, we could have had air cover before they even landed, but you look at, you know, look at all the pictures of D-Day landings: they're all during the day, right? Those are all during the day, although the bombardments for three days beforehand were day and night. Day and night, the ships bombarded and the planes, bombing, but the landings were—and you look at Okinawa and Iwo Jima—all the landings were during the day, because how else could you see the Higgins boats going in there couldn't see any impediments in the water or you know, or anything.

So, but it was done at night because the CIA figured, I mean it was really, uh poorly planned and part of it was that it was all done under [President] Eisenhower. I mean the planning was all done under Eisenhower and he used the CIA, because they thought it would be much more secretive. Well, the CIA recruited all these Cubans. Well, and Castro had—and there were a lot of Cubans that were still, you know, faithful to Castro, so he knew where it was, where it was. He had all his troops there and so forth, so the whole thinking, it was the CIA was planning the invasion with very little military input. You know, that was a big mistake.

Cohen: How long were you on the USS *Beale* at the Bay of Pigs? And also, was anybody from the field assigned to do rescue work, from those who were, you know, from the *Sam Houston* warship?

Bales: We were not given any responsibility for rescuing any of the Cubans. We stayed outside three miles, stayed in international waters, which is a three-mile limit<sup>10</sup> and the *Sam Houston* was right in there, so we were never given permission to

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<sup>10</sup> Three miles from shore is the limit of territorial waters, according to international maritime law.

go in and try and rescue anybody. Um, that ... the one boat with the few people that went in as advisors came back, although there were some from other ships; some American advisers that did get killed in Cuba. But, uh, no, we ... we could see the flames and stuff from where we were and ... but our only concern was that the Cuban, the Cuban planes, the few that were left, they were bombing the beaches and stuff. But we didn't want them to bomb us, so we were at full, you know, general quarters, to make sure that if we saw planes coming towards us, we were going to try and shoot at them. We were out in the water. So, it would have been, you know, tough for them to do.

Cohen: When did you receive orders to leave that area?

Bales: Most of the time was [spent] escorting the *Sam Houston* and then the actual landing and the invasion. We probably only hung out around a couple more days after that. But I know we were totally gone; we had already been out for two weeks, and we were heading back home. So down there, we're up probably another ten days, that we were involved for about ten days from the time we left we were told to turn around and go down until we got back to Norfolk. And see, that's the captain's ... the captain they had, we had the single sideband radio<sup>11</sup> and he actually informed his wife, the captain's wife, that uh you know we were going south and didn't know we wouldn't be back or anything like that. So the captain's wife and Barbara and the other Navy wives—especially the officers' wives—they became very, very close. And they learned right away, and Barbara would say that the Captain's wife (Mrs Johnson said that the ship was turned around and she couldn't say where. She said we got going, going south to the Caribbean someplace and didn't know when we'd be home. And you know, there wasn't gonna be ... so all the women, they didn't know when we were going to be home or what we were doing and so forth. And then when they heard of course on the TV, black and white TV, that there was an invasion of Cuba, they figured out that that's what we were involved with somehow.

Cohen: So there was this worry with the lack, the minimal communication?

Bales: Well, yeah.

Cohen: What did the servicemen or civilians think about this, um, this *invasion* and was there even a lot of information available at the time or not so much?

Bales: No, there was very little information. We didn't know, you know most of the stuff from the time; you know, the uh, Freedom of Information Act [FOIA]<sup>12</sup> ...

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<sup>11</sup> Radio modulation band used to transmit information.

<sup>12</sup> The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552, is a federal freedom of information law that requires the full or partial disclosure of previously unreleased information and documents controlled by the United States



well, the one book<sup>13</sup> yeah, the interview that was how many years after that? But no, we really didn't know what was going on. Even, uh, we knew there was an invasion, we didn't know anything about you know, how many thousand prisoners were captured or how many were killed or anything like that. Yeah, because we were just you know, *there*. I'm sure there are people in the CIA that had that, but I mean we were just the guys. They sent us down south, you know, we did escort this ship and that's all we knew. [Laughs] All the other information came out years later.

Cohen: So, a year and a half later, October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1962, begins at the Cuban Missile Crisis. So, I'll ask you a similar question: When did you become aware that the Soviets had planted intermediate and medium-range missiles in Cuba?

Bales: Well, that was ... Here again, we were, we were out at sea in October and regular things and here again, we got another thing to go south, go south. And then Barbara said ... there was all the women, at least the officer's wives got together with the captain's wife and listened to TV when Kennedy said—he gave that to his talk, it was the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October, something like that, I forget what the day was. But all the women were together watching TV and uh, they figured that's where we were going, you know, we were on our way down there and we were, when he [President Kennedy] gave that talk, we were already down there. We had turned around a few days beforehand, so we were already down in the area and, well, in... What I'm trying to think, what day we brought up the uh, the day we worked ... 24<sup>th</sup>, when did we bring up, also 27<sup>th</sup>, October 27<sup>th</sup>, is when we brought up the uh, one of the Russian submarines, B-59 ...

Cohen: So, would you like to talk about that, like - how you worked with the other boats the [USS] *Coney* and the [USS] *Murray* and who identified it and so on?

Bales: Well, it was ..., they were pretty sure that there were gonna be Russian submarines in the area and that's why they sent us down, that was our specialty: anti-submarine warfare. Someone had, one of the other ships from another squadron, but they also had sonar but not as sophisticated. But they thought they heard something, so that's when we, we headed over towards that direction and that's when—remember these ships, the Russian subs still had to come up to the surface to recharge their batteries and run their diesel engines—and they send out a communication to either the other sub trying to get back to

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government upon request. The act defines agency records subject to disclosure, outlines mandatory disclosure procedures, and defines nine exemptions to the statute.[1][2] The act was intended to make U.S. government agencies' functions more transparent so that the American public could more easily identify problems in government functioning and put pressure on Congress, agency officials, and the president to address them.[Wikipedia]

<sup>13</sup> Mr Bales is probably referring to the 1990s opening of the Soviet archives. He also may be referencing the book *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2002, by May & Zelikow.

Russia and that's when one of our radar men picked up the transmission and determined it was a Russian. And so that gave us a bearing—at that time you give a bearing because you can tell where it's coming from—so we moved in that direction and we and at those times when we were going, we would be set up. We wouldn't be pinwheeling, you know. We were just searching. We were in a formation going with all of our sonar *pinging* and so forth.

And as soon as someone picked up a reflection, you know, because the sonar would send a sound beam out and bounce off the sub and come back. That's, that's active sonar echo. Passive sonar is, you're just listening, you can hear much further. As soon as you hear something when you can switch to active Sonar but the beam out it doesn't travel as far. So anyhow, with a sonar we had picked up the sub. The SAU, a Surface Attack Unit—we would go in and begin pinwheeling around the sub. You know, because you get on top of the sub. You're going, you're trying to stay, well the sub can turn this way or turn that way and you're not sure which way they're turning. So what we would do is we'd always be pinwheeling at the front end of the sub and as we would go past, we'd keep it and then there'd be another one of our ships coming behind us. And that's what's called *pinwheeling*. That was a tactic.

And so we would try to never lose contact. Once we got contact, we would not lose contact because it was not a non-nuclear sub; it was a Russian, an older Russian sub. And so we kept him down there. He could not uh, he could not surface at all and that's what I said, that the living conditions on that sub were absolutely terrible because of the heat. They said in the archive records that we went into, they'll hit 130 degrees. Can you imagine being in this tube at 130 degrees and not being able to breathe and so forth? It was back in the '90s, when the Russian and the American archives were opened up that we were able to gain access to both the Russian interviews and the American interviews and what went on during that time. And that's when we found out, we didn't know until the Russian archives were opened up—what was that that was like thirty years later, twenty-five years later, that they had nuclear-tipped torpedoes on those subs. We never knew that until the 1990s; We thought that the biggest threat was from the missiles on Cuba but actually with the biggest threat was [the Russian] submarines that had nuclear-tipped torpedoes. And if you've seen the movie *13 Days in October*<sup>14</sup>, all that, the movies and so forth ... there was a lot written on it, but at that time, they were concerned about the guided missiles and not even thinking about nuclear tipped torpedoes. And we were just doing our job, uh and we had no clue, we never do, we had no clue you know, what kind of danger there was. We didn't know they had nuclear torpedoes, we were just trying to bring this sub up and so we ... it did come up and that's when we saw them coming out and they were all sick and so forth.

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<sup>14</sup> [sic] Mr Bales refers to the 2000 US film, *Thirteen Days*, about the Cuban Missile Crisis.

But in the 90s, when we learned that the uh [Robert] McNamara was the Secretary of War, the Secretary of Defense—he used to be Secretary of War, and then they changed it to *Defense* because it sounds less threatening—had sent out to the Russians an international sign that we [would] drop five, five hand grenades, which would be the sign to surface. And uh, well that word never got to the captain of the sub we brought up because they were far away from Russia. So we did, we dropped five—oh, and we were pinging them, and the other thing is the sonar, if you're inside a sub and the sonar is pinging on you, the sound inside the sub is just—it's not this little *ping*, it is a loud PING! It really can hurt the ears unless they you know, block their ears or whatever they did. So we were on top of them pinging them as hard as we could and uh, they had to be suffering a lot and that's when the captain, and he heard the five hand grenades um, and said, “Arm the torpedoes”, You know, put the nuclear warheads on and they were gonna fire at the Carrier *Randolph*, that we were with. And the political officer that agreed with the captain, but uh [Vice Admiral] Arkhipov<sup>15</sup>, in the story said, “No”. In interviews with his wife afterward, this is in the archives, interviews with his wife—said that he didn't talk about it much, but he had been in one of the very first Russian nuclear submarines a year or two before that. They had a serious meltdown in the reactor and killed a lot of his crewmen very brutally from radiation poisoning. And so he personally had experienced the impact of nuclear radiation just on the one sub that he was in charge of So he's the one that said, “No.” No, he ... either it was his conscience, or he felt that it was just he didn't want to get into that kind of a war. And as I said, I'm surprised ... the captain but the way it's set up, he refused to give his code that armed the nuclear warhead. And I guess it's you know, the way it's set up. But even today it's set up on ours, is [that] the captain did not know the code that he had, that Arkhipov had, so even if he shot him it wouldn't have done any good, because the code would have died with him. So, that was it and after they came up, um, and we were doing Morse Code, and they turned and went back and we escorted them, you know, east away from there for a while and then let them go. And then, we came home after a while.

Cohen: Quite a story. So, when the submarine surfaced, you saw the men looking ill?

Bales: Yeah ...

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<sup>15</sup> Vasili Alexandrovich Arkhipov (Russian: Василий Александрович Архипов), 1926-1998, known as ‘The Man Who Saved the World’. Mr Bales relates the story, noting the chain of command on the Russian sub and Arkhipov's crucial place in it: he was second in command, after Captain Savitsky. As such, Arkhipov held the password to launch the nuclear warheads. Thankfully, he chose not to give it.

Cf., i.e.: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/oct/27/vasili-arkhipov-stopped-nuclear-war>;  
<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB399/docs/Report%20of%20the%20submarine%20mission.pdf>

Cohen: What happened next? Like were you, were you or anybody else on the USS *Spiel* like interviewing them, were they—

Bales: Oh no ... we were, they were going long, and they came up at night. I feel what time it was; it was like the twenty-four ... twenty ... so, eight fifty at night. It was dark. Then in October, we had our spotlights on, the spotlight from the ship, and we had helicopters flying over with their spotlights on them. So, the ship was fully illuminated; they were taking pictures and so forth, but we were not able to communicate. Anything that we did was either by light—it had to be by light, and I remember, you know anybody that didn't have to be on watch was at the, along the, you know ... I'm on deck looking at this Russian submarine and something we've never seen. But we were uh, probably 100 feet away. We didn't want to get too close because in case they turned, or we turned or so forth like that. But we could see, because it was so well lit from all of the spotlights and they slowly turned and as I said, we escorted them to make sure they didn't dive, as far as we could and then they took off.

Cohen: So, did you escort them into the area that was no longer quarantined by Kennedy, no longer blockaded? Like did you escort them all the way back to wherever ...?

Bales: We escorted them away from Cuba, out into the Atlantic. I forgot how long, you know, how many .... uh, maybe a day, because they can't, they weren't going very fast, you know, maybe going six [or] seven knots or so ... But we, uh, totally surrounded them and they finally ... we just, there may have been, I mean for us—we are called off—there may have been some ships that did follow them all the way across, I don't know, But we were ... after at least a day and a half, we were designed to go home, because that's when President Kennedy and [USSR Premier Nikita] Khrushchev have agreed to, you know, take—and during that time remember, during that time, there were a lot of Russian ships that were stopped by other destroyers and other [US] Navy ships, because [of] the [naval] blockade, so they had the blockade going on at the same time that we were discovering the submarine.

Cohen: So, we were ... I think in the material that you sent me, they mentioned I believe that two other Russian submarines were detected as well. And I wondered whether it, whether any of those were in view when you were on the USS *Beale*?

Bales: No, we learned about the other subs, uh, they were never, they never surfaced, and we did not look for them. We learned about it again through the archives of ... uh, the number of subs that were there, and I don't know why, and they all were armed. The one thing we did there, all the subs were armed with nuclear torpedoes, but none of them—the [B-] 59 was the only one that was surfaced,

and it was when they, again in the archives, it was Arkhipov at that time, it was according to his wife, he was criticized for not giving the code. He should have been a hero, but he was actually criticized by the Russian military, Russian navy for not ... for going against the captain's orders. That was his wife telling that, her story, so I could see that, but you know that, and if they had hit the *Randolph* with the ten, you know, kiloton warhead it would have wiped out every ship in the area only because, well, it would have turned over the ships. I mean, it would have destroyed ... that I mean the *Randolph* would have disappeared but, the huge wave you know, any ship within a few miles of that would have been turned over and turned upside down and capsized, so it would have been a real mess. The submarine caused more problems than the missiles on the, you know, on the land!

Cohen: [Laughs] So, this is blowing my mind! So, Kennedy was not aware of the nuclear warheads on the submarines either when he was in the talks with Kh[rushchev]...

Bales: Right.

Cohen: --Only years later, when the archival material came forward ...

Bales: Correct. They thought there was nuclear warheads on the land-based missiles in Cuba, but they did not have any idea that the submarines had nuclear-tipped [missiles]. [Laughter] Yeah, you know it really is an amazing thing. It was one guy. One guy, as they said, one guy: Arkhipov, that stopped [WW3], changed history ...

Cohen: Amazing [laughs]. Wow. After that, did you go back to Norfolk, like after you accompanied the sub ....

Bales: Oh yeah, we got we went back to Norfolk; headed up and got home at the end of October and that was '62 and then we continued doing you know, ASW [Anti-Submarine Warfare] operations and so forth. And there weren't any crises and then I formally resigned in the, in '63 ... I mean in 1963! Yeah, moved from active duty to the reserves and then Barbara and I came home to Chicago from Norfolk, and I started with the Motorola Corporation in 1963 as an engineer and stayed there for forty-seven years. My work with Motorola was in engineering and then sales and marketing and later global training ... and we have four kids and so it's a good life.

Cohen: That's great. So at the time, before you had information from the Russian archives, what was your opinion of how the Cuban Missile Crisis was handled? Like you and your peers and so on?

Bales: Yeah, I really do feel that because of the fiasco of the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy handled the Cuban Missile Crisis very differently: much more forcefully, much more openly. I mean he told Khrushchev, “You know, we're not going to tolerate missiles there.” He was so much more assertive, and I think it was the lesson learned in the Bay of Pigs. I had friends in the [US] Air Force that were in the B-47s and B52s at the various air force bases, were on twenty-four-hour standby. They had crews in the cockpits ready to take off and SAC [Strategic Air Command], B-47s and 52s in the air all times and all the ones on the ground were ready to take off. So we knew it was serious. It was about the [Russian] missiles on land that could hit Chicago, could hit New York and so forth. And that's what Kennedy was uh, much more forceful saying “You know you're not gonna win this one. We're gonna take them out.” So I thought the funniest thing was that Kennedy did promise Khrushchev they had they put missiles in Cuba, well we had missiles in Turkey —right next to Russia. So Kennedy agreed to take our guided missiles out of Turkey, but that was never publicized until much later, after Kennedy's death<sup>16</sup>.

Cohen: Oh, I didn't know that was publicized so much later. That's very interesting!  
[laughter]

Bales: He was brilliant. He got the Russians out without giving up anything, but he gave up Turkey, but nobody knew about it or only a few people knew about it.

Cohen: Yeah, so I think in 1963, you said you're now working as an engineer for Motorola. So, where are you and your family living at this point?

Bales: Oh, Barbara and I we came back, and we rented an apartment at Milwaukee and Elston [streets] in Chicago, because my folks and her folks were close. As I said Barbara lived six blocks from me and my mom and dad knew her mom and dad. We moved there, and I started in September, September 9th, 1963, for Motorola and then stayed there forty some years and so and then in 1964 we had our first son and then daughter in 1966, a daughter in 1968, and a son in 1971. Yeah so we've been in the Chicago area the whole time—the only time that uh, either Barbara and I have been out of, I mean, lived outside of Chicago, or the Chicago area—we live in Park Ridge<sup>17</sup> now, we [have] lived in Park Ridge for sixty years—but uh, um, has been the three years in Norfolk [VA] otherwise, we're city kids.

Cohen: Gimme one second. Oh, yeah. So, I was wondering what motivated you to go to the naval reserves and whether this in some ways involved you either directly or indirectly in the Vietnam War or the Korean DMZ [De Militarized Zone] conflict? You know how it affected your reserve service?

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<sup>16</sup> Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, TX on Nov 22, 1963.

<sup>17</sup> Park Ridge is a suburb of Chicago. Mr Bales considers the outlying suburbs as part of the ‘area’ of Chicago.

Bales: Well, every year I would get an assignment, you know. If I was called up, I'd be on board, they'd tell me the ship and each summer I would go away for two weeks. I went to Norfolk on the USS *Norfolk*, and you know different ships and different things for another uh, what, seven years and each week—oh no, it's every *other* week—that there used to be a Navy armory, right down at the base of Randolph and Lake Shore Drive<sup>18</sup>. This was from, left over from World War II—right now it's at Randolph and Lake Shore Drive, it's Monroe Street Harbor—but there was a big building there that goes back to World War II which was the Navy armory and that's where I used to go for my reserve meetings. And I was in charge of a reserve group there. I belong to the Naval Institute and like, three different Navy things ... I keep up to date on what's going on in the Navy and different, different magazines and so forth. So I guess I've always been, always been a very strong pro-Navy and I find it fascinating and as I said, we still have good friends from the Navy, very close. The ones who we're closest to Jim and Jean Dunn: they live outside Washington, DC and they have four kids and we're godparents to their second son. And their kids and our kids we used to get together in Philadelphia or someplace during the summers and so for, but it was, uh, yeah it really is a, there's a *country*, you know, in the military. Anyway, you ... whatever you're talking about any of the military guys, you're talking, you know, whether it's World War II or uh there's a, because you've gone through something together that a lot of people never get to. You have a relationship still, you know. It's really a special relationship, inspires ...

I have friends that were—I went through college with—that were in the Marines. They were in Vietnam. I talked to them. One of the officers on our ship, Jerry McDaniels, he was a naval officer and he got assigned to Vietnam and he got killed. We found his name on the wall<sup>19</sup> I think you know how terrible war is, I mean, I think it's part of the human condition. I think, I know we haven't learned how to, you know, live—especially today now, probably with Russia and China. You know, China wants to be on the top of the heap, that we are so far ahead technology-wise, and ... but the Chinese, I mean there's so many questions ... the Chinese, if they wanted to close off the Taiwan Strait—you know between China and Taiwan and we're... we're committed to protecting Taiwan, but if China invaded Taiwan, we're not going to go to war over Taiwan and all the Chinese have to do is [that] they have their submarines, they're building fifty submarines right now. But they're all diesel powered, because they're coastal. They're not going to go out into the ocean; they want to protect the coast and so they're low-cost submarines. And, uh, another big thing these days is mining. Our Navy is doing a lot of stuff on it, because the Chinese could mine, put mines in the Gulf

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<sup>18</sup> The intersection of two streets, right off Lake Michigan in downtown Chicago.

<sup>19</sup> Vietnam Veterans Memorial, in Washington, DC, which lists the names of the fallen veterans on a wall.

of Taiwan<sup>20</sup> and that's the biggest danger to the submarines, because you hit a mine and it blows the bottom off your ship. It's still very sophisticated, mines ... it's an important part of warfare, a very important part of navy warfare these days. They can do it to us just as much as we can do it to them.

Cohen: Yeah. Where were you when you heard about the assassination of President Kennedy and what was your reaction?

Bales: I was working at Motorola at Augusta Boulevard—that was their plant, the big facility at 4500 W. Augusta boulevard, in Chicago—and I remember we were, I was an engineer, and we were manufacturing the radios, the two-way radios, we're out in the factory. It was in the factory, I remember someone came, went over the loudspeaker that—like, I guess you got the security system you know, they could announce all over the place, if there was an emergency, an announcement or something—that he had been shot and they actually shut down the plant, told everybody to go home that day. And so I came home we were at the apartment and Barbara was there watching TV. We had a little black and white TV, a little Motorola TV, and that that's when they were giving all the updates. And I remember, I think that was, was that a Thursday or Friday? I forget what the day was, but for the next three days we never left home we just watched TV, but the whole time—and it was so unbelievable that whole, that whole episode—if Kennedy had not been shot, I think the Vietnam War would have been totally different and you know, I think he, uh because remember he had already been through the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban quarantine and uh, he would have handled that differently. So who knows? I think there would have been a mighty, it might have been a different world. But, yeah, who's to know?

Cohen: How do you think your naval service contributed to your civilian life?

Bales: I interviewed for two or three different companies when I got back. I went through a headhunter, and they had set me up for an *interview*—at Motorola. So I started with the HR—Human Resource—manager and told them about my background and that I'd been the officer and I had been, you know, a division officer and all the leadership stuff and all that, and the practical application of technology to the real world, and you know, repairing everything and so forth. And so he immediately put me in touch [with] one of the managers: Max Peckhart, who was head of systems engineering I interviewed with Max and interviewed with Raymond ... I can remember these names: Raymond, Lonnie and other people and I really liked them. It was really a great place, a wonderful place and so I went, I went home probably later in the afternoon. I got a call from the headhunter and said I'd just been ... he said, "They called me they want you to start work next week. "They offered me \$530 a week," he said, "That's

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<sup>20</sup> I.e., the Taiwan Strait, AKA the Formosa Strait.



the highest I've ever ... ". He said, "You got to take this job". He said they wanted me to start work Monday. He said, "Yeah they want you. "And so um, so well so I got a job and started there Monday. I loved it, everything. I was there at the Augusta Blvd plant and then I was out in Schaumburg<sup>21</sup> and then out there I did, it was, engineering. Then I became a national sales manager and then I became a head of marketing for our global efforts. And then then I became one of the directors of Motorola University. We set up the global university to train all of our people, our suppliers and so forth and the fun thing was I was the United States representative on education to OECD—Organization Economic Cooperation and Development—in Paris, based in Paris.

I represented the United States business interests in education to the OECD and so I got to go to Paris three times a year. And I remember the first time I went, and I was staying at the Hilton hotel right by the Eiffel Tower. I was after dinner, I was sitting out looking at the Eiffel Tower—I'm saying this is no fun, so I told Barbara, "Next time, you got to come." Well, we had four kids so, but she went with me, at least we figured, I went to Paris—I did that for ten years and we went to Paris, I went there about forty times and Barbara went around thirty times ... We know our way around there. OECD was the nineteen largest countries in the world. So we get together for three- or four-day meetings and they would talk about the education issues facing the different countries and it was fascinating to hear what drives other countries and their education systems versus ours. Yeah, yeah, this is really fascinating.

Cohen: Yeah, really fascinating. Did you ever go to visit Cuba?

Bales: No, I mean, we're on-board ship. I was in Guantanamo [Bay], but that's ... I've never gone back to Cuba. It still is, I guess you could now, but it .... Yeah. No, I've never gone back there.

Cohen: So, one thing that I found when I was looking up was an insignia for the USS *Beale* that is called 'sub snooper' with a picture of a dog on it ...

Bales: That's the shield of the *Beale*?

Cohen: Yeah, I was wondering if that if that was something that people used?

Bales: Well, I'm trying to think of what you're talking about ...

[NOTE: technical problems in recording here, cut for smoother content c. 1:27-1:29]

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<sup>21</sup> A suburb of Chicago.

[*Note: Image of the USS Beale shield and insignia is shared digitally. Bales and Cohen then discuss the significance of its elements.*]

Bales: Okay now I see you. Okay, this is the official ...

Cohen: Okay, that's cool.

Bales: That was like ... it's painted on the smokestack and it's on the iron patch and so forth.

Cohen: If you want to talk about what it represents, but I think you are. Like using the arm patch and the dolphins and ... what's the little hand on top?

Bales: There's two, there's two dolphins and then this is, you know, well no, it's the pitchfork of—who is the, you know the .... it's Neptune! King Neptune, that's King Neptune's fork. And then there is the stripe and that goes back to this that they gave me when I left. But yeah, that's the official shield of the *Beale*.

Cohen: Okay. Did you cross the equator? Were there any [ceremonies]?

Bales: Yeah, I crossed the equator on the battleship USS *Wisconsin* and became a shellback<sup>22</sup> and I still have my certificate and that's where you go through all of the goofy stuff they do. They spend all day you know making us do stuff, but yeah, I got across the equator twice.

Cohen: And would you like to talk about the medals that you have as a result of your service?

Bales: Oh well, there were, yeah there's, well we got three: one was for the Cuban Missile Crisis; one was for the Bay of Pigs; and the third, the third is the Armed Forces medal which almost everybody gets. So, the two unique ones uh, were awarded ... actually I didn't get them for about ten years. They finally decided to make the medals available. So I have them in a frame downstairs with all my other stuff.

Cohen: And uh yeah, so one thing that the Pritzker Military Museum and Library [PMML] aims to do is to share stories or collect artifacts of the Citizen Soldier, you know, and have it be a forum to discuss the military and politics. So, I guess I'm wondering, like does the term "Citizen Soldier" mean something to you?

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<sup>22</sup> Shellback: colloquial term used in the US and UK navies to signify that the sailor has crossed the line of the equator. Mr Bales goes on to mention the rites associated with this maritime tradition.

Bales: Well, I think that one of my big concerns is that if you look at government today, whether it's the [US] Federal government, Congress or the Senate, or the Illinois [State], uh there's so few politicians that have any military service and so a lot of the decisions they are making are not based on any of their personal experience, which I think is really lacking. I mean they're, they are committed to public service, because they're elected and so forth. But it's a really a problem in that we have so little understanding that our governing, our governing bodies [have of] what it's like to be in the military. As lot of the decisions that get made are based on a lack of experience and information in that scene. So, I think, you know, I think I want kids, you know... None of the kids have any military experience—they love to hear the stories, I think I don't know any of our kids' friends', if there's any military service in any of, you know, their networks at all. I still hang out with, well I have some friends in a sportsman's club who are Chicago policemen or policemen or are in the reserves right now, but they're older and the young ones don't have any of the experience or you know. So, I, yeah, I am concerned about the clear understanding of ... yeah, I think we still, you know there's a big ... it's a big discussion. Should the United States be the world's policemen?

That's always been kind of our role, you know. And think who else is going to do it? You want Russia to do it? Do you want China, you want Iran to do it? [laughs] There's really nobody ... I mean, I think by default ... well, we have to do that. I think when we gave the Panama Canal back to Panama, you know we have never, we have never conquered; we've never been a conqueror. We have been, we have fought and always given the country back, you know? We never, not like Britain that dominated half the world, or you know and look what we did after World War II? I mean we rebuilt Germany; we rebuilt Japan. I mean, who does that? You know, the Marshall Plan ... I mean in our, all those former enemies or no ... you know, allies and but I think America, despite all of our problems and differences and so forth, we're still uh, the most free and democratic republic in the world. Not without our faults: we got a lot of it, we do still do a lot of stupid things, but I think uh, we're better than ... Who was it, was it Winston Churchill said it, said maybe I think it was Churchill [who] said, "Democracy is a terrible form of government, it's only better than all the rest."<sup>23</sup> [Laughter] I really meant that, believe that. I mean you know, compared to other forms of government but it's better than any others.

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<sup>23</sup> The famous quote was indeed Churchill, spoken in the House of Commons on Nov 11, 1947, but Churchill was quoting an unknown predecessor: "Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed **it has been said** that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.... "

Cohen: That's true. Is there something that you would like to talk about that we didn't cover today?

Bales: Well no, like, as they say ... I've been through the [PMML] museum three or four times. I think it's great. First, I think it's great what the Pritzkers did to the building. You know, they rebuilt it ... First time Barbara and I went there, went to, we were on it was Open House Chicago<sup>24</sup> in October. And that's just after it was open about four or five years ago, I think— a bit longer at this point, but maybe more like nine, nine years, ten years but it still feels new even now, you know?

Cohen: Right.

Bales: And then we did go to the library—so maybe it just opened, so it maybe nine years ago and then we, and then I've gone back a few times and probably should visit more. But I like the, as I said the last time I was there when you had all the photos of D-Day and I still do watch the History Channel and a lot of stuff on World War II and there's some really good stuff on there, on how [and] what happened, but I know I— Do you know the lending library? Uh, can people actually ... I've never investigated, but can people actually take out those books? I've seen all the books and stuff that you have ...

Cohen: Basically yes, as long as they're willing to be members. So, they can borrow the books for a few weeks. The other possibility is to borrow books through inter-library loan. So, say for example, your local public library does not have a book that you're interested in, and we do. You know, the local library could request it from us through interlibrary loan, so you're probably gonna have a library ...

Bales: Oh, that's great. You're part of the library lending, you know that network ...

Cohen: Yeah, yeah. So, it's it's really, it's really good. And the other thing is when we reopen the third floor, people are welcome, uh, to come in and read and do research-type things.

Bales: Yeah, I don't think I've been on the third floor.

Cohen: So, the third floor is basically, it's like the ... I mean, there is part of the exhibit there, as well, but there is also a lot of the books are there. Not all of them, but let's just say many of them are there and there's tables and desks set up, um, and there's somebody at the desk for circulation and for reference and so on.

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24 Yearly architectural tour of notable buildings in the city.

Bales: Well next time, I'll have to, I have to go to the third floor, because I think I've only been on the second floor.

Cohen: That's right. And come and take a look. And if you are interested in the details, you know most of our exhibit is online with the same captions that you would read in person, so I could send you the link to that as well.

Bales: You know what, yeah. So, everything is online?

Cohen: It is, both the D-Day exhibit and the one that's also on World War II, on the end of the war—that's the focus, on the Pacific but also a bit on the Battle of the Bulge and so on. And another exhibit, in conjunction with the [Chicago] Holocaust Museum, is the American liberation of concentration camps, so it's also ....

Bales: On Friday, this Friday, I'm going with a friend to the Holocaust Museum in Skokie. I haven't been there [before].

Cohen: Yes, that will be really interesting.

Bales: So, what's your website?

Cohen: You know, can I send it to you ...

Bales: Yeah, you got my email. Send it to me because I want to want to get on it.

Cohen: Yes, yes ... So, I think I think we need to wrap things up, or if you think that there's more things to discuss, we can always arrange for a continuation. So, but in any event, I would like to thank you for your service, for the fact that you explained naval technical matters extremely clearly to people like myself and for your enthusiasm and thanks once again. And we will send you a challenge coin as a token of our appreciation.

End of Interview atf 1:41:38

