Oral History and Folklife Research, Inc.

AN INTERVIEW WITH TOM STURTEVANT
INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIBER: KEITH LUDDEN

KJL: Let me start with a little biographical data. You were born here in Maine?

TS: No, I was born in Waltham, MA.

KJL: Waltham, MA.

TS: In 1928. My folks at that time were living in a small town in Massachusetts, Bedford, MA, then we moved to Concord, MA, and I spent most of my boyhood in Concord, MA. I went to the local schools, graduated from Concord High School, in 1946. In 1946 I went to Clark University, stayed there for four years, and got out of Clark with a B.A. degree in 1950. In 1950, the Korean war broke out. June 25th, I think, 1950. And at that time the draft was enforced, and I didn't feel like going into the Army, or being drafted, so in the fall of 1950, when the war was really getting hot, I enlisted in the Navy, the United States Navy.

KJL: Now, were your parents born here in Maine, or in the US?

TS: My father was born in Maine; he was born in Hebron, ME, and my mother was born in Illinois. I think she was born in Elgin, IL. Her father was a watchmaker, and he had worked at the Waltham Watch Co., and then decided to go to Elgin, IL., where watches were also being made, so he lived in Elgin, IL, for a few years, I guess, then came back to Massachusetts. My father and mother met each other in Waltham, MA. My father—that was during the Depression—he had a series of jobs, and finally was able to get a job working for a company that was in Bedford, MA.

KJL: What did he do in Bedford?

TS: In Bedford, MA, he worked for the New York Pharmaceutical Co. The word, "New York," was used in order to lend a certain amount of prestige to the company.

KJL: Some cachet.

TS: Yeah. It was located in Bedford, which was a very small town—quite large, now; a large suburban town, and he worked for a company that made medicine. The primary product of this company was a brand of medicine that was called Hayden's Viburnum Compound. It was invented by a Dr. Hayden, who started making the stuff. I'm not sure when he started. It was a place called Bedford Springs, and the springs there were supposed to have medicinal value. They erected a hotel, there was a hotel. As far as I know, it's still there. It's been turned into condos. It was a beautiful spot.

The name of the road leading into the Bedford Springs Hotel was called "Sweetwater Avenue." I've never forgotten the name of that street. Sweetwater Avenue. There was a pond there, and springs, and the hotel, as I said, plus that's where Dr. Hayden apparently lived. And the hotel business folded, I guess, so they concentrated on making the medicine. And the medicine was shipped all over the United States and into foreign countries, and was in little bottles, and had fifty percent alcohol, and it was supposed to be good for "women's problems."

The business was, of course, in Bedford, but my folks found a home, a house, in Concord, MA. I don't think my father and mother liked the schools in Bedford, and they thought that as we grew up, we might have to go to Lexington High School, and Bedford kids did go to Lexington High School, so I guess they liked Concord better, so I went to Concord High School. [I] graduated in '46, and then went to Clark, and war broke out in 1950, the year I graduated. I felt the draft burning down my neck, so I joined the Navy.

KJL: And you went into the Navy in 19…

TS: 1950.

KJL: 1950, OK. You went in under what rank?

TS: I was an ordinary seaman. I became an ordinary seaman, I guess. I went to so-called "boot camp" in Newport, RI.

KJL: It's seaman, seaman first class…

TS: No, I guess—seaman recruit, I guess. And then after boot camp I qualified—I wanted to be a parachute rigger, or a meteorologist. I had taken some meteorology in school—in college. I knew the Navy had all kinds of jobs for recruits. I put down something like being a meteorologist, or a parachute rigger. That was kind of romantic. So the Navy saw fit that I was pretty good in certain areas, maybe in mathematics, or technology or something, so they sent me to the technical school in Memphis, TN, and I became an electronics technician.

I'm not sure how long that lasted. I think it might have been twenty-eight weeks. The training was quite rigorous. You had to build a small radio. We learned about radar and a lot of stuff connected with electronics. And after electronics school, aviation electronics outside of Memphis. It was in a town called Millington, TN. It was outside of Memphis, but we used to go into Memphis for liberty. We had time off and…

After that school in Millington, TN, they sent me to the west coast, where I joined the Tailhook Squadron. The Tailhook Squadron was VA-55. VA-55 was an attack squadron. They had propeller-driven aircraft. They were AD4's at the time, I think. They were fixed-wing, propeller driven, eighteen cylinders, rotary engine—very, very powerful aircraft. And they had a tail hook on them, in the aft portion of the aircraft. So it landed and took off from aircraft carriers.

KJL I want to back up just a little bit.

TS: Yeah, sure.

KJL: Tell me about boot camp.

TS: Boot camp was in Newport, RI, Narragansett Bay. I was there, I joined in—let's see—November, 1950. The war had been going on in Korea for (inaudible). So i was at Newport, RI. It was rather cold at that time; the wind coming off of Narragansett Bay. The football season had begun, I remember pulling liberty, walking into a bar and watching a professional football team play against another one, and it was rather cold.

We learned a few things in boot camp, how to tie knots and the usual stuff that you find in boot camps—close order drill and Navy customs and protocol, how to fold your clothing. It wasn't as harsh as a Marine boot camp, or an Army boot camp, and having a college degree under my belt, I had a somewhat different perspective on military life. So it was somewhat harsh, but not as (inaudible) as it could be.

KJL: Did you have some sort of drill instructor, or…

TS: Yes, we had that, barracks, you know, living in barracks, marching to meals, marching back from meals, and then going to classrooms, and learning about the Navy.

KJL: What was the drill instructor like?

TS: (Laughs) I can't remember. I remember I had one, I had some—practicing drumming in high school. Some how that got through to the powers that be at Newport, and they thought I would be good for the band. They asked me to try out for the band, and I did, and I guess I wasn't a very good drummer. We had a pick-up band in high school, and that was the extent of my training. I never had any formal training in drumming. In fact, kept doing the stuff that musicians did not have to do.

KJL: You went to the west coast, and joined the Tailhook squad.

TS: That's right.

KJL: What was your job on the Tailhook squad?

TS: Maintain and repair electronic gear—transceivers, headphones, radar, pieces of radar, IFF gear. That means "identification, friend or foe." That was a box full of electronic circuits that a pilot could send out coded messages, something. I'm not sure if I can remember—to make sure that the aircraft was a friend and not a foe. Somehow the ship could pick up the aircraft approaching the ship as a friend or a foe. So it was called IFF. I also took care of radio altimeters. That was electronic gear that enabled the pilot to decide how high above the ground he was. They were quite easy to repair and fix. But the main problem was transceivers, a combination of receivers and transmitters. We had to keep those pretty—keep those maintained, operating, That was our main chore; keep those transceivers going. And if they wouldn't work, we pulled out the one that didn't work and slapped in a new one. So, that's what we did.

The shop was just below the flight deck, so the aircraft would take off and land just above our head. It was a racket all the time.

KJL: So you were on an aircraft carrier.

TS: Yeah, the USS Essex. (inaudible) CVA unit.

KJL: And your shop was just below the flight deck?

TS: That's right.

KJL: It must have been pretty noisy.

TS: It was. There was a lot of noise up there during flight operations. Very noisy. And the deck was a wooden deck, believe it or not. The wooden deck was over steel plate. So the steel plate, plus the wooden deck. The deck—the planks, or the wood was maybe—the planks were maybe four or five inches thick.

KJL: Why wood?

TS: Good question.

KJL: Did it have some give to it?

TS: I don't know if it had much give to it. I understand now that the flight decks are made out of steel. I'm not sure why they used wooden flight decks. I presume it might be something—might cushion the landings a little bit better. I know that sometimes when there were crash landings the propeller chewed up the flight deck—splinters all over the place, especially when you had plane with a propeller on it.

They [were] also introducing jets at that time, so they had jet aircraft. I think we had mostly propeller driven aircraft. There were two or three squadrons of propeller driven aircraft. One had the AD's, which we had—Douglas, single engine aircraft. And we had some of the old inverted gull wing—let's see, what'd they call it—FE4 or something like that. The wings folded up, for easier storage. There were also some jets, and they were noisy too.

KJL: Tell me about your first trip out to sea.

TS: Ah, I can't remember. All I remember is leaving San Diego, leaving Point Loma, a beautiful peninsula, and then steaming, not steaming, because we didn't have —we had oil fired engines. Now a lot of the carriers are nuclear powered. And steaming across the Pacific and going into Pearl Harbor And at Pearl Harbor we had a few days off, and then we went to Yokasuka—I think that's how you pronounce it. That was in Japan, and that was near Tokyo, In fact, I guess it was in Tokyo Harbor, Tokyo Bay. After a pause there, we went online, we went off the Korean coast, and proceeded to launch aircraft to bomb and strafe Korea—especially North Korea. I'm not sure how much bombing and strafing we did in South Korea. It was mostly in North Korea. And I believe we provided close air

support to Army and Marine Corps elements on the ground. We were on the carrier several miles off the coast, but we could see the coast. Very mountainous, it appeared to me, looked west to see Korea. A lot of mountains and snow on the mountains. We were there off and on . We'd stay online for maybe thirty days at the most, perhaps. I can't remember.

Then we'd go back to Yokasuka and replenish. Give the ship time to make any repairs. i remember once they had to go into dry dock. Something happened to the screws, or the prop. The propeller that drives the ship. There were three or four. Four of them, I guess. That gave us some time to pull liberty in Japan; go to Tokyo, Kamakura. I remember that. There was a big Buddha there. Then after the ship took on stores and replenished and gave the crew and members of the squadron some time to relax, we were back out online and proceeded to bomb and strafe again.

KJL: What was Tokyo like at that time?

TS: That was in 1951. For the most part, it was a very bustling city. I don't remember seeing any bomb damage from World War II. There may have been, but I didn't see it. It was full of neon, very brightly lit, a hustling and bustling and teeming city is what it was. It was a wonderful place to pull liberty.

KJL: What made it a wonderful place to pull liberty?

TS: Well, all kinds of restaurants, sights to see; you walked around the imperial palace. There was a big moat around it as I recall. Prices were cheap. Lots of attractions for sailors on liberty—women, food, good food. I remember having Japanese meals, sitting down at a small table, not much higher than that table where your equipment is located (He refers here to a coffee table where the interviewer's laptop and microphone are placed).

KJL: Yeah, about two feet off the ground.

TS: Yeah, and you were waited on hand and foot by kimono clad women. You could rent a room in a hotel very cheaply, then go back to the ship and go back out online again. So it was a brightly lit, almost cosmopolitan city. You could buy anything you wanted. There were stores all over the place. I remember sort of a gambling type of place, and you could go in and play pachinko type of games. It's something like a slot—not slot machines, but I don't know what would be the equivalent of a pachinko game. Anyway, the place was filled with those. (inaudible) got people playing pachinko. I think I tried it once, but if you did the right thing, you might have gotten some money, I don't know.

KJL: So you spent all your time on the ship, not on the mainland?

TS: Yeah.

KJL: So, did you see a lot of the guys come back in the airplanes?

TS: Yes. I think we might have lost one pilot. He didn't come back. The captain of our squadron was shot down, and he was recovered by rescue aircraft. I'm not sure how he was rescued. He might have been shot down two or three times, but every time he was rescued, and came back. The aircraft, of course, was lost. But for the most part, we suffered no casualties, except that one pilot, as I recall. I remember one sailor did not make muster, and they searched all over the ship. I think he was either pushed overboard, or committed suicide. He never showed up at muster. There may have been some others that I don't know about,

KJL: What was life like on the ship? I hear carriers described as a city within themselves.

TS: You're correct. At the time I was on the Essex, I think there were maybe two to three thousand sailors aboard ship. That's with the air group. The air group consisted of

several squadrons. VA55 was one of them. When the air group was on board, we had the aircraft, plus all the equipment plus the men in the squadron. Then they had what they called the ship's company. They maintained the ship, and had the usual duties that sailors had on all warships—quartermasters, bosun's mates, and engineers, communicators experts, radar operators—all the chores that would keep the ship moving and in shape were members of the ship's crew, or the ship's company. That's what they called it.

They were also responsible—members of the ship's company were also responsible for launching the aircraft and receiving them when they came back from a mission. That was all done by members of the ship's company. The landing signal officer, waved paddles on the fantail to tell pilots that they were approaching too high, too low or too fast, and then we had the crew, or the members of the ship who launched the aircraft from catapults, which I believe were steam driven. And they also keep the aircraft on the flight deck, and getting them ready for takeoff or landing.

The aircraft was positioned off—behind on the flight deck. On the aft part of the flight deck and then they were signaled to come up to the place where they would rev up the engines and finally get up enough power in the engines to take off. Usually the propeller driven aircraft did not need to be launched by the catapult. It was the jet aircraft then needed to be launched by the catapult.

KJL: Now, why is that?

TS: I guess the jets were harder to—they required more speed; a longer takeoff point, and since the aircraft carrier had a certain limited space for takeoff, they had to be launched at a faster speed. A propeller driven aircraft did not need that, I believe. I'm not that expert on it.

KJL: It must be something to see those aircraft launched off that deck.

TS: It is. It's quite a scene. They tried to keep us away from the catwalks where the catapult people were. I never went up forward. They were too busy launching these aircraft. I believe that the catwalks down below were sort of off-limits. I didn't go up there. I could see them from a distance. Our shop was probably amidships. So I'd go out on the catwalk up there and watch them go off, but even there it was somewhat dangerous because there was always debris on the flight deck—grit, pieces of metal and stuff.

The carrier would go into the wind, because if you had the carrier going into the wind that would increase the ability of an aircraft to take off. So when you had twenty or thirty propeller driven aircraft with their engines going, plus the speed of the ship, it was pretty darn windy out there. Once in a while, I 'd have to go out there, I'd change a radio —a transceiver, I should say—while the aircraft was warming up. The wind would whip around on our legs because I had to get up underneath the aircraft, and it was very, very windy out there. We took the old transceiver out, and put the new one in, and if you're lucky you get it in time so that the aircraft would take off and go on its mission. It was very windy up there, and if you didn't have goggles on, you could get a hunk of stuff in your eye, you know. It was really unpleasant to be on the catwalk when the flight operations were taking place.

When they landed, they'd also head into the wind, because they'd come off, onto the fantail of the flight deck, and they'd have to turn into the—the ship would turn into the wind, and it would still be windy out there. There was always a chance that an aircraft may make a bad landing and get dumped into the catwalk, where you might have been standing, so it was a little bit dangerous.

We used to go up on the island. The island was where—that was the nerve center of the carrier. That's where the captain was, and where the radars were, and the landing—the person who controlled the landing and taking off procedures was. If you went up there, you could see the aircraft landing and taking off, but it was still windy up there. And you had a sort of a vantage point. You could see aircraft coming in. Sometimes they crash

landed. It was kind of ghoulish to get up there on the island and wait and see if an aircraft was going to crash.

KJL: Did that happen sometimes?

TS: Oh, yeah, yeah. It happened often.

KJL: Did that happen (inaudible)?

TS: Once in a while, yeah. I remember once the aircraft (inaudible) the officer in charge of the electronics in our squadron. He took off, and you usually go below the bow and then they come up again. Well, this aircraft went down below, and never came up, so it got dumped in the water. The ship was able to avoid colliding with his aircraft, and he went by—the ship—he was in the water. I remember waving to him (laughs). He was able to get out of the cockpit, and he was rescued by a helicopter, but the aircraft sank. He was never able to accomplish his mission. Something went wrong with it, I think. Probably the engine.

KJL: Now, you said there was a large number of people on the carrier—about two thousand, did you say?

TS: Maybe two to three thousand, I would think. I understand there are about five thousand now. It's like a floating city.

KJL: Was the ship's company integrated?

TS: What do you mean—Blacks and whites? Oh, yeah. I have to say, though that I think that most of the orderlies and workers in the mess—that's the place where you eat —there seemed to be a preponderance of Black folks. I think we had one Black fellow in our squadron, but it was mostly a white oriented operation with Blacks in the mess. That

was the places where we ate—and orderlies, also. Cooks. Cooks and bakers were mostly —seems to me they were Black. There were some whites.

KJL: How did you feel about that?

TS: I didn't like it. Being from the north, I didn't like it, and I first became acquainted with apartheid, if you want to call it that when I got on the train and arrived in Memphis, TN. I went into the station there and I saw a sign over the waiting room. It said, "White waiting room." And I thought it was named after some guy named White. And then I wandered around the station, and I saw another sign over a water fountain, a place where you get a drink of water. It said, "White drinking water," and finally it dawned on me that this drinking fountain was for white people, and Black people had a separate water fountain, and a separate waiting room for Black folks. There was no such guy as Mr. White. And that rather shocked me. I didn't think that was right, but being in the military, I didn't do a damned think about it. I went into a white waiting room and waited for somebody to pick me up and take me to the technical school I was supposed to be going to.

KJL: It would have been—for lack of a better phrase—"rocking the boat?"

TS: Yeah, yeah. I wasn't prepared for that. I hadn't the slightest idea that waiting rooms, toilets and drinking fountains were separated by race. It was amazing. I was so naive to this white waiting room. I thought it was a guy named Joe White, who did something great for the city of Memphis.

KJL: What were relations like on the ship?

TS: There was no racism that I could detect, although it was probably under the surface. I had a feeling that the orderlies who waited on the pilots were probably smoldering. "Why weren't there more Black electronic technicians?" I thought to myself. And at other rankings, too; at other jobs, other fields. But they seemed to be confined to

preparing food and waiting on pilots who were one hundred percent white. I imagine they worked down in the officers' quarters on ship. I think we might have had one or two at the most in our squadron.

KJL: Now, the Essex, did it spend the entire Korean War just off the shore?

TS: No, they went back and forth. I think they had two or three missions off the coast of Korea. They spent a certain amount of time on their mission, then they'd go back, pick up another squadron. I think that happened two or three times. There were other carriers involved too, I mean there must have been a dozen of (inaudible) carriers off the coast of Korea, bombing the hell out of the Korean infrastructure and providing close air support to the troops.

We really probably turned North Korea into a desert. And it got so bad at the end that they were shooting at ox carts carrying ammunition up to the Korean troops. Locomotives—the pilots prided themselves on being able to shoot a steam driven locomotive. They had a lot of photographs of locomotives being blown up; freight trains being blown up, trucks being blown up, demolishing the railroad depots. We did a real number on North Korea. It's no wonder there's some degree of animosity by the North Koreans, especially their leaders, now against the United States. We turned that country into a desert.

In fact, I think we violated international law. And the Air Force, I'm not sure how much the Navy had a hand in this, but the Air Force deliberately bombed dams in North Korea. The idea being that if you bombed the dams and broke the dams, the water would rush down and flood the rice fields. North Koreans depend upon rice as a food staple. When it's flooded with water or ruined, the crop is ruined [they] can't eat and the people starve. And I believe it's a violation of international law to destroy food supplies for civilians. Pitiful, really, and the Air Force did it. Whether the Navy had a hand in it, I just don't know.

KJL: Did you advance in rank?

TS: Yeah, I was a third class petty officer, aviation electronic technician, and I advanced to second class petty officer aviation electronics technician, and if I'd stayed in I probably could have gotten aviation electronics first class, so—first class petty officer. And if I'd stayed in long enough, I'd probably become a chief petty officer, aviation electronics technician, but the war was winding down in 1953, and I thought about having the Navy as a career, but with a college degree, I didn't think I should want to pursue a career in the Navy, so I got out.

KJL: So how many years were you in the Navy?

TS: Three years, nine months, twenty-seven days (laughs).

KJL: Had them counted.

TS: I joined in November and I got out in September.

KJL: Tell me about the day you left.

TS: Left the Navy?

KJL: Uh huh (affirmative)

TS: I remember having a physical and I was in San Diego, I believe, at the time. That was the home port for the Essex. I had a physical and they found me OK, and they gave me some money, I think, to get back home. In the meantime while the ship was in port, I purchased and automobile, a used Pontiac. I don't think the ship was going to go back at sea, and since I'd made the decision not to stay in the Navy, I purchased a car, a used car, and I traveled around, I went up the coast and went swimming, did some body surfing and went to see the telescope at Mr. Palomar, and went down to Mexico. I went

to that fleshpot of a city called Tijuana, and I even went down further, to sort of explore the west coast. So I purchased this Pontiac Coupe and decided to go across the country and back home in this Pontiac. On the way back I stopped at the Grand Canyon, Yosemite, Kings Canyon National Park and slowly went back to Massachusetts at this time.

I have no regrets about serving in the navy, but I do have regrets about the way we—the way the war developed in North—in Korea. I've read subsequently about the war, and I believe the war never should have taken place. After the war, there was a series of dictators in South Korea. I thought that was what we were supposed to be against. I also thought that we were fighting against the communists, but Stalin had believed, had thought, or had the view that Korea was not very valuable to him. So as far as I know, he never did send in any troops, communist troops.

There were, I believe Russian, or communist instructors for [the] North Korean Air Force, whatever (inaudible) They had MIGs, at that time. That was a big thing. they had MIGs. Very good aircraft. Very maneuverable, as I understand it. Perhaps they had Russian instructors or trainers in there, but there were—to my knowledge there was no commitment by Stalin to have Russian troops there, fighting alongside the North Koreans.

I believe that Korea never should have been divided at the thirty-eighth parallel. The division of Korea into two sections, the north section, and the south section was the result of two men in one room deciding to divide Korea into two parts. The Russians would occupy the north part and the Americans would occupy the southern part. Korea, for the most part, was one nation, and to divide it into two parts without consultation of the Korean people was a a big, big mistake.

KJL: Those two men your mentioned, MacArthur…?

TS: No, no. It wasn't MacArthur, it was—I can't remember their names. I'd have to look it up.[1]

KJL: (inaudible)

TS: But I think Americans don't—are ignorant of the history of Korea. It's a very, very old country, and it was occupied by the Japanese from 1905 until 1945, when the war was over. And the occupation period by the Japanese was a very cruel occupation. Very, very cruel. When the war was over in 1945, I think most Korean thought that the country would be one country. Instead, it was divided.

We supported collaborators—that is, collaborators who worked with the Japanese agains the Korean people. In North Korea, most of the collaborators were shot when the communists came in. The communists were led by a fellow who fought against the Japanese in Manchuria, and tied down Japanese divisions. In other words, his keeping elements of the Japanese army occupied in fighting helped prevent those elements from stopping the U.S. as they marched across the Pacific, island hopping. Otherwise, there were more—I don't know how many Japanese divisions are being tied down by the communists, fighting the Japanese before the war broke out.

KJL: Was the Essex in Korean waters when the truce was signed?

TS: It may have been. I'm not sure. I don't think it was. But the war was winding down. The war, incidentally—there was a truce, there was no treaty. Technically, we're still at war, and we have maybe thirty-thousand troops in South Korea. What they're doing there is part of a strategy or policy of keeping an eye on the Chinese. We have bases in—I don't know how many bases we have in South Korea. We have a division of Marines in Okinawa. We have Taiwan, a country we've just sold millions, if not billions of weapons. We have military bases—a base—at least a base in the Philippines. We were

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[1] Sturtevant is perhaps referring to Dean Rusk and Charles Bonesteel, who defined the American occupation zone in 1945.

able to get out of South Vietnam, and we have practically encircled the Chinese on their east coast, with the idea of keeping them—I'm not sure what the purpose is.

KJL: Now, you came home from Korea in 1953?

TS: Yeah, yeah.

KJL: So then it was about 15 years until Vietnam heated up?

TS: 1953, and the Vietnam war broke out in the 1960's, 1962, yeah.

KJL: How did your experience in Korea affect your attitude toward Vietnam?

TS: Having read something about the origins of the Korean War, and hearing some of the statements—reading some of the statements about the Vietnam war, I was quite suspicious of our motives in going into Vietnam, and as I read more and more, I became an opponent of the war and actually took part in protests against the Vietnam War. I think the stories of veterans coming back helped tip me off, helped make me think twice about being in Vietnam.

I remember being in Augusta (Maine) and a Vietnam vet was on a bicycle. He started up in Maine, in Fort Kent. He was riding his bicycle. He might have started from Portsmouth, I don't know. Anyway, he's riding his bicycle the whole length of Maine and he stopped in Augusta. There was a rally in Capitol Park, and somebody drove a car right onto the Capitol Park grounds. thee was a small crowd there, and two or three—I'm not sure who they were—but they burned their draft cards right there. Burned them. Quite a sight. On the car's hood they put a lot of literature, so I helped myself to some of the literature. This fellow had a microphone—there was a microphone. I guess they spoke. Some of them spoke. These veterans spoke about the futility of the war, and that we shouldn't be there. That was one little incident that turned me around.

KJL: Do you remember what year that was?

TS: No. Also, I had been reading statements by the American Friends Service Committee. That a anti-war organization, also does social organizing, helping poor people who have been injured, or lost their housing in natural disasters, and it won—was a co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, shortly after World War—I'm not sure which war it was.[2] 1940—anyway, it was a co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, together with the Friends Service Committee in Britain, and I read their statements. They were very persuasive, and I became a volunteer of the American Friends Service Committee. I've never regretted that. So, the anti-war protests were more popular; started out with a few people, and then it gathered momentum, and pretty soon there were protests all over the place. Especially the colleges.

I was glad I joined the anti-war protests. The protests were very often led by veterans of the Vietnam War. I would say that thousands of veterans of the Vietnam War too part in these protests. They were usually in the vanguard of any protests. So I felt very comfortable knowing that fellow veterans were opposing this war.

KJL: I remember my experience with sitting in a dorm room, watching them pull the numbers out of the barrel.

TS: Yeah, the Selective Service?

KJL: Yeah.

TS: Yeah, the Pentagon finally wised up, and they've done away with draft cards. Burning their draft cards was a symbol of their opposition to the war, so they don't have draft cards now, anymore. What you do is you go to the post office and pick up a registration form and send it in, and join the data bank. However, there are ways of

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[2] The American Friends Service Committee was a co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947.

trying to defeat that if ever you want to become a C. O., a conscientious objector. You could write on the registration card, “I’m a conscientious objector, I oppose war, and all types of wars—all wars”; make a photocopy of that registration blank, and keep it in a file, so that when you—if they call you in the present system, you can say, “I’m a conscientious objector”, and this photocopy of the registration card on which you have written, “I’m a conscientious objector to all wars,” will help persuade a draft board that you really, truly are a conscientious objector. You have to be sincere in your declaration of conscientious objection and you have to be opposed to all wars. It doesn’t necessarily have to be on a religious basis. In other words you could—you don’t have to belong to any organized religion to be a C. O.

KJL: Now, when you went into the Navy you enlisted?

TS: That’s correct, yeah.

KJL: You weren’t drafted.

TS: That’s right

KJL: Okay,

TS: I told you, you know, I felt the hot breath of the military draft system on my neck, so I joined.

KJL: And your rank again, when you left was what?

TS: Second class petty officer, aviation electronics technician. Second class petty officer.

KJL That must have been some tour of duty.

TS: It was quite interesting. I have to admit that I did see some sights of the world, at Uncle Sam's cost, you know, and I did receive some training in electronics, and I got a taste of military life. so there were some interesting things that I received from being in the military.

KJL: Now, when you left, what did you take up as a career when you left?

TS: Well, I already had a B.A. degree. I was what they call an English major, like Garrison Keillor. So I went back to school to get a master's degree, so I went and spent a year at Columbia Teacher's College, down in New York City. I had the tuition and the board—I received checks from the government. I guess they had a Korean G. I. Bill, so I spent a year down in New York City getting a master's degree, in the teaching of English. And then when I go out of that school, I got a job in Connecticut, teaching high school in Branford, CT. Then I wanted to be closer to home, and I had always liked Maine, so my father had retired and lived in Maine, and so I got a job at Cony High School, and I taught there for twenty-four years. Three years in Connecticut and twenty-four years in Augusta.

KJL: You enjoyed teaching?

TS: Yeah, it was very challenging. I liked the kids. Very challenging, however, and I miss the classroom now and then. I'm also very glad to get out.

KJL: I know Mary said that you had someplace you had to be at noon.

TS: Yes.

KJL: So I will wind things up, here. Is there anything else you want to point out to me that I might have overlooked?

TS: Well, I believe that all wars are the result of political decisions. I think von Clausewitz said that war is another way of conducting politics, or some words to that effect. All wars are the result of political decisions. I am now opposed to all wars. I joined an organization called Veterans for Peace. Veterans for Peace started in Maine in 1985. This is the twenty-fifth anniversary this year of the organization called Veterans for Peace. It started—the first meeting we had was in Auburn, ME. A beautiful July day.

And the organizing genius behind this organization was a Marine, an ex-Marine, whose brother was killed in Vietnam. He was able to get three or four other veterans to start this organization. Another fellow—a friend of mine was a hospital corpsman in Vietnam. There was a minister from the west of Maine, who has since died. He was a chaplain, I believe, in the Army. And there was also a young woman down in Gardiner. She was a Naval dentist, or something like that.

And there was another man up in northern Maine. I think he was a combat veteran. Those four or five people started the organization, and we had the initial meeting in Auburn, ME, on a beautiful July day in a church near Lake Auburn. And there were about twenty-three others of us there, and the organization has since grown to seven or eight thousand veterans for peace, throughout the United States, and at large members in foreign countries. We have a convention every year and the next one is going to be this August, August 25, in Portland, ME, at the—what's the name of that hotel down there?

KJL: Holiday Inn by the Bay?

TS: Holiday Inn by the Bay, yeah. You're welcome to go there.

KJL: I might take you up on that.

END OF INTERVIEW