

Transcript: Leroy Frank Seevers

Transcribed by Kristen Muenz

GARDNER: Well, good morning everyone. My name is Ted Gardner and I'm an interviewer for the Library of Congress Oral History Project here at our great Public Library of Cincinnati. And this morning we have our videographer and historian, Miss Daly, who runs this program so well. And we have a great honor and pleasure to have Mr. Seevers here today. What's your first name?

SEEVERS: Leroy.

GARDNER: Leroy. Leroy Seevers. And Leroy was in the World War II Navy. I understand your father was in the World War I Navy.

SEEVERS: Right. He was on the Battleship Maine.

GARDNER: No kidding. Oh my goodness, she was a famous ship. She was part of the old White Fleet, Great White Fleet, went around the world.

SEEVERS: Right.

GARDNER: Well, anyway, we have the honor of having Leroy Seevers here this morning and we're going to find out all about you. Where were you born, Leroy?

SEEVERS: I was born in Guilford, Indiana.

GARDNER: Now, where is that?

SEEVERS: North of Lawrenceburg? About 12, 14 mile.

GARDNER: Okay, all right, very good.

SEEVERS: And where the ski slopes are at out there, you know where the ski slopes are at?

GARDNER: Oh, yeah, yeah. Perfect Slopes.

SEEVER: Right above the ski slopes, up on the hill.

GARDNER: Right, exactly. Okay, tell us about your family. Did you have brothers and sisters?

SEEVERS: I have one sister who is three years younger than I am. And I have three children. Pam's the oldest and I have two boys that's a little bit younger than she is. [GESTURING TO THE AUDIENCE IN THE VIDEO RECORDING] That's my granddaughter. I have another granddaughter that's in - she'll be a senior in Hanover College. This one is a school teacher. I have a grandson that's 14.

GARDNER: Wonderful. Great family. Where did you go to school? Where did you start primary?

SEEVERS: In a one-room schoolhouse at New Alsace, Indiana.

GARDNER: I'll be darned.

SEEVERS: And the most we had in the eight grades was, I think, 18 students. That's all we - that was a top for all eight grades.

GARDNER: For heaven's sake. My goodness. Well things - that was, you certainly knew everybody, didn't you.

SEEVERS: [LAUGHS] Oh yeah, very well, very well.

GARDNER: That's great. And then after the eighth grade what happened?

SEEVERS: I went to high school at Guilford, Indiana.

GARDNER: Guilford.

SEEVERS: Which was a small - we had the largest graduating class of everyone out of there, and I think there were 40 some in that class. But that was it.

GARDNER: Well, in those days, you know, my goodness, 1920s... you and I both remember them well, and things are so different from what they are today. Did you have any particular interest in school? Did you have hobbies or athletics or anything like that?

SEEVERS: Went home and worked on the farm.

GARDNER: You were a farm boy.

SEEVERS: Right, right. And you didn't have many hobbies. You went home, you went to work.

GARDNER: [LAUGHING] That's right. That was it.

SEEVERS: That was it.

GARDNER: Well that - I know, and that was wonderful training, wonderful training. And of course that was the backbone of our nation.

SEEVERS: Right.

GARDNER: Farms and the farm families, and how they worked and produced and everything. Okay, so, let's see now... then you finished high school, what, about 1939?

SEEVERS: That's it. '39.

GARDNER: Okay. And you stayed on the farm?

SEEVERS: No, my uncle was a road contractor and I went to work for him.

GARDNER: Oh, you did?

SEEVERS: In fact, I went to start working for him when I was 16.

GARDNER: Wow.

SEEVERS: I'd work in the summer.

GARDNER: Well, that's good training, too. [LAUGHS]

SEEVERS: Yeah, construction.

GARDNER: Yeah, it's tough work.

SEEVERS: Yeah, it was tough work.

GARDNER: I'll say. Yeah. That's great. Well, you know everyone has memories of outstanding dates in one's life. And one of them, of course, is December the 7th, 1941.

SEEVERS: Right.

GARDNER: Where were you when you heard the news?

SEEVERS: Probably at home, because at that time in the winter, there was no work in construction, and I went to work for Kelly Cat over in Covington, making x-ray machines.

GARDNER: Oh, for goodness sakes.

SEEVERS: I worked there as a machinist.

GARDNER: I'll be darned. Well, you certainly had an affinity for machinery and technology and so forth.

SEEVERS: Right.

GARDNER: That's wonderful. Well, Pearl Harbor, of course. It was one of the key points in the person's life who grew up in the 20th century, and... what happened? Did you get a notice from Uncle Sam that you were -

SEEVERS: No. I was working at Kelly Cat and I worked at night. From 6:00 at night to 6:00 in the morning, five days a week and a half day on Saturday. And I stayed there until probably the first part of August of '42. I went home for a weekend and there was nobody there anymore. All the young fellow of my age was gone. So I went back to work on a Monday morning. And when I left on Friday or Saturday I said, "Well, I won't be back." And the guy says, "Well," he says, "They'll draft you." I says, "No, they won't, because," I says, "tomorrow I'm going to enlist."

GARDNER: [LAUGHS]

SEEVERS: So I went and enlisted. [LAUGHS]

GARDNER: Yeah, that was - there was a spirit among the young fellas in those days, you know, to sign up and serve your country. And of course the Navy, all that glamorous stuff, you know, join the Navy and see the world. We sure learned about that in a hurry, didn't we?

SEEVERS: [LAUGHS]

GARDNER: [LAUGHS] Well, but where did they send you?

SEEVERS: I went to Great Lakes.

GARDNER: Great Lakes, right up north of Chicago, yeah. Great place. It's a wonderful place. How did you like boot camp?

SEEVERS: Well, when I went I weighed 135 pounds and when I come out I weighed 150. Does that answer your question? It's pretty good.

GARDNER: Put on some pretty good weight there. [LAUGHS]

SEEVERS: [LAUGHS]

GARDNER: Good old Navy chow.

SEEVERS: Right. Regular R's and a lot of exercise.

GARDNER: Yes indeed. And you were still growing, too.

SEEVERS: Oh yeah.

GARDNER: Oh yeah. You were a fine young man. Well, you were there, what, about 90 days?

SEEVERS: Yeah. I think that's what it was.

GARDNER: And you came out as a seaman.

SEEVERS: Right.

GARDNER: And tell me about your training.

SEEVERS: Then they went - when I went back after my boot camp leave, they sent me to Richmond, Virginia to school for diesel. And I come out of there I think as a, probably a first-class fireman.

GARDNER: Wonderful.

SEEVERS: And then from there they sent me to Miami, Florida, to subchaser training center in - I don't know how long I was there. But from there, I went to Key West and that's where I caught the ship.

GARDNER: And you - did you have any knowledge about what a subchaser was?

SEEVERS: Absolutely none.

GARDNER: Nothing. [LAUGHS]

SEEVERS: [LAUGHS] I knowed it didn't look very big.

GARDNER: I know! And she was wooden, too.

SEEVERS: Right. The interesting thing about going from Miami to Key West is we went a night in a bus, and you can see ships burning off of the coast. And they tell me that there was more ships sunk between Cape Hatter's and Key West in six months than there was in the entire war with Japan.

GARDNER: Right.

SEEVERS: Freighting.

GARDNER: Right. Yes, the Germans were very, very efficient with their submarines, of course, their “unterseeboots” as they call them. And you know, there were so many crazy things that happened in the early days of the war because we just weren't up to snuff on -

SEEVERS: Well what they done, they laid down - I guess there's like a channel where the Gulf Stream comes up and they dropped down into there. During the day and at night they would pop up and the ships would be silhouetted between them and the beach. And that's how they got so many ships. And that's the reason the subchaser went back into service, for just that reason.

GARDNER: Mm-hm. Yeah, because the subchaser was very prominent in World War I Navy.

SEEVERS: Yeah. Well, basically the World War II subchaser was on the hull of a World War I. And I think they built them in like 30 days.

GARDNER: Wow.

SEEVERS: That's all it took, and they were all built by small boat builders along the coast that built fishing boats.

GARDNER: That's interesting.

SEEVERS: And they were all wood. I mean, even the ribs of the Mayflower had steel ribs, but the Sub Chasers had wooden, and that's the reason that they were all built. You could keep a submarine down. You couldn't outgun them, but you could keep them down with the depth charges.

GARDNER: Oh yes, you bet your life. How many depth charges would you carry on that thing?

SEEVERS: It's either 12 or 15. I really don't remember.

GARDNER: Boy, they were deadly. Deadly, in World War II.

SEEVERS: The one I was on we had what they call "mouse traps" on the bow, which were like rockets, and they were fired electronically. And they had a [GESTURES] about that big around, about that long charge. And they had to hit something before they would explode. And you tip the racks up and then they fired. And once in a while if you fired 'em and hit a whale or something they would go off.
[LAUGHS]

GARDNER: [LAUGHS] How about that. Now you had gunnery on on that boat too, didn't ya?

SEEVERS: When I first went to board, we had a French 75 and two 20s. And we made one run to Guantanamo, and from there we went up along the coast to Norfolk. And they had a big crane that come up alongside of us and picked us right up and set us up on the pier. And they let us go home for, I don't know, a few days. It wasn't very many. When we come back, the French 75 was gone, there was a 40 millimeter put on, and there was an additional 20 millimeter. So we had the mouse traps. We had a 40 millimeter. We had three 20 millimeters and we had the depth charges. After we went overseas, we added two more 50 caliber machine guns and two 30 calibers.

GARDNER: Oh, that's pretty good.

SEEVERS: They said we had more firepower for our size on the battleship.

GARDNER: Yeah... I was following you there and that sounds like an awful lot. I never I never saw a subchaser. I don't recall anything like that.

SEEVERS: Well, [NODS TO AUDIENCE] Kristina has a picture one if you'd like to see it.

GARDNER: Oh yeah, that's beautiful.

SEEVERS: Now, that's not our ship, that's one with basically the same thing.

GARDNER: Yeah, the type, yeah, right. Well, they were they were handsome crafts and good-looking ships.

SEEVERS: Yeah.

GARDNER: And, then, let's see. Now you told me earlier the complement of your -

SEEVERS: 20, 24 enlisted men and three officers. And at one time the commander of the ship was an ensign. We had three ensigns on board.

GARDNER: How about that. [LAUGHS] Oh that's - that's as low down as they can get.

SEEVERS: Yep.

GARDNER: For sure. Well, that's very interesting. Do you have any stories about enemy - seeing those enemy submarines, or anything like that?

SEEVERS: Not too many with submarines. Some of the interesting things: when we when we crossed the Atlantic, we refueled four different times, I think it was. And when you try to refuel something like that alongside of a big tanker, when it's rough, gets pretty rough.

GARDNER: Oh boy.

SEEVERS: And we didn't have - we only had, I think, 1,200 gallon of fresh water. So we were rationed to, I think, 3 cups of water a day. You didn't wash unless it was salt water, you didn't wash your clothes. And you never took your clothes off unless it was to change them. You slept in your blue jeans and your shirt. You took your shoes off when you slept and that was it.

GARDNER: Always ready to go.

SEEVERS: Well, if it was sunk, they wanted you fully clothed. And if one of those were hit, it didn't take long for them to sink.

GARDNER: Right.

SEEVERS: It took us - we went to Bermuda. The civilian workers at Norfolk done such a poor job that we was taking on a lot of water. So we stopped in Bermuda, and the Seabees come aboard. And in about three days, they solved all the problems.

And then we went on to - took us 21 days from Bermuda to North Africa, and we's on convoy duty. And when we went to land in North Africa, it was actually a beachhead. And they told us, they said, "Now the French might shoot at you, and they might not." So they shot for about four hours then they quit shooting. Quit.

GARDNER: That was it.

SEEVERS: And I don't know how long after we landed in Africa... but I know the first night I had shore patrol. Now why they give me shore patrol first night in Africa, I don't know, but the captain said, "Take a billy club in a whistle." I said, "Captain, they're shooting at each other over there." I said "Can't you hear them?" "Oh well," he says, "I better give you a gun, then, hadn't I?" [LAUGHS]

GARDNER: [LAUGHS]

SEEVERS: So he gave a gun. [LAUGHS]

GARDNER: Hello? [LAUGHS]

SEEVERS: So I went on shore patrol, but we operated from... the first place we landed was a [SURE SHELF?]. And then not too long after that, we hit a whale. And it stoved in the bow, bent the propellers, and we were dead in the water.

GARDNER: My goodness.

SEEVERS: All the blood from the way all around us. And about that time the sharks begin to show up. And I thought, "Well, this is a heck of a way to die, but I guess this is going to be it." But there was a PC, which is a hundred and sixty-five foot, I think, steel boat - they come alongside and they pushed us to the shore. And they had a little trolley run out into the ocean for fishing boats to repair. And they run us up on that and they pulled us out. Now how they done it, whether they had a winch, whether it was powered by horses or an engine, I don't know. But the Arabs repaired the bow and the machinists, we beat out the propellers with sledgehammers.

GARDNER: For heaven's sake.

SEEVERS: And we got 'em close enough that we could run 12 knots without vibrating and we could run 13. But if you run 12 and a half it just shook you to pieces. And while we were in that area we pulled into - and I think it was Oléron, and they had three or four of the crew had to put on our dress blues when we went into the harbor. And we all, "Why in the world would you go into the harbor and have to put on your dress blues?" We went by the cruiser - the Savannah, I think it was - and there was President Roosevelt sitting with a blanket over his lap, and Churchill was with him, and Stalin was with him, and I think de Gaulle. And of course, it didn't mean nothing to us. We just had put on our dress blues and we didn't really want to. But that was our first experience of with any -

GARDNER: With any big timers.

SEEVERS: And how many people have you interviewed that saw those four people together?

GARDNER: You're the first one. [LAUGHS]

SEEVERS: [LAUGHS] But we had - we stayed close enough to the coast and we'd take on water. We'd pull in alongside of a fishing pier - or, most of them had a stone wall. And we pulled in and they had fresh water. And if we were out on patrol and we didn't have enough fresh water and we had a rainstorm, we would rig tarpaulins and run the water into the water tanks. I can remember going up into the mountains in Africa with garbage cans and filling them full of water and bring them back and pouring them in our water tanks because we couldn't make any freshwater.

GARDNER: Is that so?

SEEVERS: And while we was - well, about the same time, we picked up a man, a body that was floating. And he was, I think, the cook on a merchant ship. And of course, we got his wallet to send home, and he had a real pretty ring with a red stone in it, and we couldn't figure out how to get that off to send it home. So you can imagine what happened. We got the ring off, but we got the finger too, and send it home to his folks.

And another time we was at Bizerte, which is right down - you could hear the guns every night, the artillery. And we was at Bizerte, and it was a real bad storm and they sent one subchaser out. And they

come back within about an hour. They lost their lifeboats and everything. All their lifelines was gone. The minute they pulled in, they sent us back out. And the interesting part of this is, right now, we went out for about an hour. And there was - we found a man floating in the water in a life jacket. But it was so rough that we couldn't get to him. The only boat we had was about as long as this rug. [GESTURES ACROSS THE ROOM] And two people could ride on it, but with 12, 15-foot waves, you can't do anything. We tried to throw heaving lines to him. And after so long a time our captain says, "Well, they always told me that oil would calm the waters." And we had two 50 gallon drums of oil on the stern of that subchaser. He says, "I'm going to get upwind of that man." And he says, "Youse knock holes in those drums and throw them overboard." And we did, and within 10 minutes, they calmed the seas enough that we picked that man up.

GARDNER: Isn't that something.

SEEVERS: But with another 10 minutes, everything was gone. But we've saved him and took him into the shore.

GARDNER: That's a wonderful story.

SEEVERS: There's a lot of things that happened.

GARDNER: Did you have shore liberty?

SEEVERS: Eh, yep. There was nothing there. I remember in Bizerte, Bob Hope come in there. And they went to every one of those subchasers and small boats and they had to send two men to that show because they couldn't get anybody to go to it. We were getting ready for the invasion of Sicily, and all you'd done was made you more homesick when you went to something like that, we figured. So nobody - so they made us go to Bob Hope show. And right after that is when we made the invasion of Sicily.

GARDNER: Did his appearance make you feel better?

SEEVERS: No, not a bit, because we were mad anyhow, we had put on our dress blues and we didn't want to. [LAUGHS]

GARDNER: Oh, that's right. [LAUGHS] Those darned dress blues. 13 buttons.

SEEVERS: Right. So we were getting ready for the invasion of Sicily, and I don't know whether - Bizerte, I don't know how far it is over to Sicily. But we picked up two Army and I think there were Darby's Rangers, and they had kayaks, but they folded up in the middle and so they weren't very long. But we got over and you went to - you could see Mount Edna, I think it was Mount Edna, which is a volcano.

GARDNER: Live volcano.

SEEVERS: And when you saw that, we made a left turn. And it was in daylight, I remember. And we put those two Rangers in those kayaks. And the first thing they done, they flipped them over, went underwater and in right back up. And then they headed for the beach. And one went under the pier at Gala, Sicily and the other one went on the point at Le Sita. Now, I don't know how many miles we might have been out, but it was it was broad daylight. When we landed that night, we went in real close to the pier at Gala. And when we were right close to it, very close, it blowed up. So the man with a flashlight under there leading us in, he was gone, I guess. But they reported us that we had blown it up and we were recommended for a presidential citation at that time.

And another interesting thing about Sicily after that - and you probably remember the 82nd Airborne, the friendly fire shot down some of the paratroopers. Okay, well we were in that group that shot them down. But what happened, they said the Navy made a mistake. Well, the Navy didn't make a mistake. I can very well remember those planes, the first wave come in, and they come in with their running lights on. And it seems to me they were pulling gliders. They were very, very low and the first wave come in, no problem. The second wave come in were German fighter bombers, come in with their running lights on, and they shot at everything. So when the next wave of paratroopers come in, we shot down the paratroopers because we thought they were German planes again. So that's - that's history that you read one thing in history, but when you stop and think of it, it wasn't really the Navy's fault.

GARDNER: No.

SEEVERS: But you never hear that. We had a paratrooper lived close to me, and he had quite an article in a paper one time about it. And I went to his house and talked to him. He said, "Nobody ever told this side." I said, "Well, I'm telling you now. It was not the Navy's fault."

GARDNER: Good for you, good for you.

SEEVERS: So it was quite interesting. And then we went on around to - and I was over there when Patton slapped the soldier in Sicily. I remember that very well, and the stars and stripes.

GARDNER: In the hospital.

SEEVERS: We went around to Palermo. And they told us, they said, "Now if you tie up at the pier, we get a bomber raid every night. So if you want to stay, fine, if you don't want to, you go out an anchor in the bay." So our skipper chose to anchor in the bay. But that night, two subchasers were hit at the pier and burnt. And while I was in Palermo, I remember seeing Marshal Tito and Patton together.

GARDNER: Good heavens. Boy, you really -

SEEVERS: And from there on we went - this is another funny thing that happened. We had a small yard tug doing a pontoon barge with the big gasoline tank on it. And we started up along a coast of Italy with that for the invasion of Salerno. But we got there about the middle of the afternoon. And the invasion wasn't scheduled for - like, that night at midnight. And while we were there, we had a submarine contact and we dropped depth charges and debris come up whether we hit them or not. You never knowed.

But there was two planes come out, and they must have come from Sicily or maybe from North Africa. And it was a P-51 Mustang and a Spitfire, and they just circled like a couple of buzzards over the top of us, all the while we were there. We were in sight of Naples, the Isle of Capri, and we were up out there with that little tug and that thing of gasoline. And when they run out of fuel, they go back, and two more would come out until that night when we made the beachhead.

And during the night there was so much going on that we kept - the ships were coming real close. So the skipper said, "Well, we're going to anchor before we get in trouble." So we anchored, but all during the night, we kept hearing stuff bumping the side. And we didn't know what it was, but we found out the next morning. We anchored in a minefield.

GARDNER: Good gravy.

SEEVERS: And 'course the mines, I guess on that wooden board, unless you broke off on those prongs, they wouldn't explode. So we took boat hooks and push the mines away, and got out of the minefield. [LAUGHS]

GARDNER: [LAUGHS] Bet that was pretty touch-and-go!

SEEVERS: And on that beachhead, I remember the first - they must have been magnetic mines or bombs, or radio controlled, because we could see them drop out of the bomb bays for the German bombers. And he'd come down so far and then they just curve over and they'd hit a big ship. And one of the ships that I saw hit was a seagoing tug, the Nauset. And one of my neighbors was on the Nauset. But that bomb went right down the smokestack into them.

GARDNER: Oh my goodness.

SEEVERS: And the sister ship, the Narragansett, started to push him towards the beach. And when they did, they pushed 'em into a mine and just broke in two and sunk immediately.

GARDNER: My goodness.

SEEVERS: Now another thing I failed to mention, the first Ducks were used in the invasion of Sicily.

GARDNER: Oh yeah.

SEEVERS: And the first ones they used, they kept sinking on them, because they've loaded them pretty heavy and sea would wash over the gunnels of it and they'd fill it full of water and they would sink. And either the Seabees or the Army Corps of Engineers put side boards, like you would on a wagon or something, about that high around them. And they put another bilge pump in. Then they could use them. And that's the only reason that the Ducks are being used later on is because they repaired those problems, because they were going to ban them.

GARDNER: Yeah. And for those who don't know what a duck was, it was a D-U-K-W.

SEEVERS: Yeah.

GARDNER: What was the acronym for it... right? I never did find out exactly what all those letters meant... "under water" or something. I don't know what the D stood for.

SEEVERS: I did know and I can't think of it.

GARDNER: Yeah. But that - I'm glad you mentioned that, Leroy, because so many people don't understand some of these terminologies and everything.

SEEVERS: Yeah.

GARDNER: But that was a brilliant invention.

SEEVERS: Right.

GARDNER: And I think, weren't they built by Higgins down in -

SEEVERS: No, those were the landing craft.

GARDNER: That was the landing craft.

SEEVERS: The Higgins boats was a landing craft that ramp drop down on the bow. Now those were LZVP, landing craft vehicle personnel.

GARDNER: Well, your action there around Sicily that was pretty intense.

SEEVERS: [LAUGHS] Yeah.

GARDNER: You guys were lucky you didn't get shot out of the water.

SEEVERS: Yeah. Well, they shot holes through our colors with rifles, but... At Sicily they said they knowed that there - it was so rough when we made the landing, they'd knowed there was something out there, but they couldn't see and tell what it was. And they had the searchlights, of course, when they'd come on us and the rest of the ships, they'd shoot 'em out. So that's how we... but after the invasion of Salerno, I saw a lot of ships hit there, and...

GARDNER: Yeah, Salerno was a very, very difficult -

SEEVERS: From there, we went... we must have went back to Sicily, or maybe to Africa. But then we were the first naval ship in the harbor at Naples, Italy after the city fell.

GARDNER: Oh, you were?

SEEVERS: And you had to push debris out of the way to get to the pier to tie up. And we tied up to the pier, and I've told this many times, I said, "I don't understand why a farm boy would do it, but the second night there I went to the Opera, in Naples!"

GARDNER: Those Italians, they had to have their opera. [LAUGHS]

SEEVERS: It was a big dome building. And it had glass panels in the ceiling, but the panels had all been blown out of it, of course, but... and then I remember while we were in Naples, we went to the Isle of Capri, which is right off the coast. And while we were there Mount Vesuvius erupted.

GARDNER: My goodness.

SEEVERS: Now, that was the first major eruption since it covered Pompeii, but this was a - I call it a wet eruption, I don't know what the terminology would be. But I tell everybody it looked like a great big orange ice cream cone, and the lava would flow down here, and then it would flow down someplace else. And most of the buildings up on that mountain side were stone. And that lava would flow around that stone for a while and finally it would just melt, just go down to nothing, and that would be the end of it. Now whether there was lives lost there or not, I don't know. I don't think there were. I think the people evacuated because they had time to.

GARDNER: Right. How far north in Italy did you get? Get to Rome?

SEEVERS: Well, no, but I made a landing in Anzio.

GARDNER: Anzio too.

SEEVERS: They said you never been to Hell till you've been to Anzio. [LAUGHS]

GARDNER: Wow. That's terrible.

SEEVERS: And we made the invasion at Anzio with one main engine out and one generator out.

GARDNER: [LAUGHS]

SEEVERS: And I'd been with the 82nd Airborne in Naples. And we were on liberty and we turned over a Jeep. And I had my knee all messed up and my shoulder and my hip. And the skipper says, "Well, I'm not taking you along to Anzio, you know, you can't do anything." I said, "Well I'm going." I said, "I done made three invasions," I said, "I'm not going to miss this one." So he said, "Okay." I said, "Just get me up on deck when we hit the beach," and I says, "I'll be okay." So when we got close to hitting the beach at Anzio, they helped me up on deck, and I set on a case of powdered milk and manned a machine gun. [LAUGHS]

GARDNER: No kidding!

SEEVERS: Made the Anzio beachhead.

GARDNER: So you had a machine gun to fire.

SEEVERS: I had a 50 caliber, right along.

GARDNER: Wow.

SEEVERS: And I remember the first, right after we hit the beach, one of those LZVPs come alongside, and they had a guy on board that had both legs shot off, right below the hips, and they were looking for a doctor. Well, we didn't have any doctor. We never even had a medic. So we sent him on to another ship. And there was a breakwater around the harbor at Anzio. So you had to go around and come in like a driveway. And they had a big gun up in the mountains. They called it Anzio Annie. It was a 24-inch gun, I think and it had - well, a man could lay in the breach of it, and it had a 90-foot barrel on it.

GARDNER: Wow. [WHISTLES]

SEEVERS: But they couldn't lower it enough to hit the harbor, but they - right outside of the breakwater. So they'd fire about three shots, and then they'd pull her back in the mountain so the Navy couldn't get the range on it. So they'd use us for decoys. We zigzag and go in there and they'd shoot at us and why they didn't realize it, don't know, but then they'd pull the gun back in the mountain. Then the bigger ships, the supply ships would come in. So that's just some of the funny things that happened.

We laid smoke in Anzio. We swept for mines. We carried, I don't know, maybe 10, 15 pounds of TNT in, like, a depth charge. And they were using a lot of - I guess you'd call them manned torpedoes. They rode them just like you'd would ride a bicycle. And we would go out and we would throw those in the water because if a man was in the water with a concussion, he'd pop up and then that that was the end of the torpedo. But the British had a gunboat there - two of them really, the Abercrombie and the Finch. And they looked like a battleship cut in two. And they had one gun on, about 24-inch gun, and they had - they would find a sandy bottom shallow enough. And they would actually fill it full of water and settle on the bottom. And then they'd sit there and bombard. And they could only turn, I don't know, 15 or 20 degrees either way because if they fired broadside it would turn them over. And we would patrol between them and the beach, and that's where we'd throw the little canisters over. And if I remember right, there was a hospital ship sunk off of Anzio. I may be wrong, but I think there was.

GARDNER: My word. Well, you saw so much action and everything that I think it's just amazing that your only injury was when you fell out of the Jeep!

SEEVERS: [LAUGHS] Now, have you ever seen shrapnel?

GARDNER: Oh yeah.

SEEVERS: Has this man seen it? [GESTURING TO SOMEONE OFF CAMERA]

GARDNER: I don't think so.

SEEVERS: I got it in my pocket. [REMOVES SHRAPNEL FROM POCKET]

GARDNER: I thought you were gonna say you still carried it in your hip.

[SEEVERS places a piece of shrapnel on the table between himself and GARDNER. GARDNER inspects it.]

GARDNER: Oh yes. Terrible stuff.

SEEVERS: At Salerno, there was so much of that dropped. And when it hit the deck, it was red hot and it would burn. So we had all those spots on that wooden deck for those - for those shells that hit.

GARDNER: It's a wonder you didn't burst into flame!

SEEVERS: Well, none of us ever was hit. We had one man got the Purple Heart because one of the smoke generators upset on him at Anzio.

GARDNER: My word.

SEEVERS: It's just - just crazy.

GARDNER: Well, you know the same thing, of course the terrible thing about our Air Force, our planes in the air. You know the enemy would fire up and then they'd burst.

SEEVERS: Right.

GARDNER: And then of course the same idea as these. The pieces would just destroy anything like that. Well, did your wooden boat last through the war?

SEEVERS: Yeah. Well, we're just getting to the good part.

GARDNER: Oh, good!

SEEVERS: When we left Anzio, we went down through the Straits of Messina, up along the coast of Italy to [FOLGER?] or Bari - one of the two, I don't know which. And an old Admiral met us there and he give us the speech. And he says, "You're going on a diplomatic mission. You're going to Yugoslavia." There was four of those subchasers. He says, "We're having problems with the German E-boats over there harassing the Yugos and you're going over. They're faster than you are but you can outgun 'em." And when he got done with the speech everybody was real happy, you know, a diplomatic mission. His last words are: "You are expendable." [LAUGHS]

So we headed for Yugoslavia and about - I don't know where we was at, but skipper called us up on deck and he said, "I need five men for a boarding party." He says, "Now if we capture one of those E-boats, it goes back to the States. Those five men will go back for bond drives." So he picked one officer and he picked a signalman and a seaman and somebody else. And he says, "SeEVERS, you go to the engine room." I says, "Captain, I can't read German, I can't speak German." He says, "You'll learn pretty quick."

GARDNER: [LAUGHS]

SEEVERS: I said, "Well what kind of a gun do I have?" I said, "I can't carry a rifle down here." He said, "Well will give you a 38." I said, "That's not big enough." I said, "I want a gun that, when I wave it at somebody, they're scared enough that they're not going to hurt me." So one of the officers says, "I've got a 45." And he said, "Whenever we go out at night," he says, "you come and I'll give you my 45." So we went over and we landed in... hm. Where Hillary Clinton said the snipers were after. It's a little island off the coast of Yugoslavia. But anyhow. That was our home base, and we would take Commandos out, or Partisans really. And there was, I don't know how many of those, and there was two or three special service men with them all the time. They called him SS troops 'cause they were Special Service. I think there were probably the forerunners of the Commandos because they could speak German. Some of 'em had been there over a year.

And I remember one fellow, he had a rifle about as tall as he was, and I says, "What kind of a gun is that?" He says, "I'm a sniper." I says, "Well, where did you learn to do that?" He says, "Shooting squirrels in West Virginia."

GARDNER: [LAUGHS]

SEEVERS: So that's the type of duty we had there. And another duty we had, we would go out at night and they would say, "Now they're going to be they're going to be bringing a flyer back from the Ploesti Oil Fields to this point, and you - they'll lay out there and wait, and if the flashlight flashes so many times, it'll be a friendly and they'll bring a rowboat out and you pick that man up. And you wait for two

hours. And if they don't bring him out, then you leave and you go back for three nights. And if he don't come out, then forget 'im."

And I remember one night, we was out there and we run aground. And I don't know what, we hit a rock or whatever it was, but some of the crew jumped overboard and got under the bow to try to lift it, you know, because it's underwater you can lift a lot. And we couldn't get off and we know there's a big German gun emplacement up on the side of the mountain. So all - the whole crew got on the stern and hung out over the fantail and bounced it up and down, and the skipper was up on the bridge. We got it bouncing real good. He give it full speed astern, and we backed off of that. But it was... they said that the Germans caught you with a knife that they'd use it on you. So we all got rid of our knives while we was on that rock, but we got off of it.

And I remember another night that - I don't remember, something to do with Mountbatten. But the Scottish one ashore playing the bagpipes on one of these islands! They would go out every night, and there must be a thousand islands along the coast of Yugoslavia. But we was out one night, and they said, "Now there's nothing out there tonight. Anything you see moves, shoot it." So we was sitting out there waiting. And a German E-boat was about the size of a PT boat.

GARDNER: Right.

SEEVERS: But they didn't have the 40 millimeter like we did, so -

GARDNER: They carried torpedoes.

SEEVERS: You're right, they carried torpedoes, but they didn't need them over there.

GARDNER: Right.

SEEVERS: But we saw this thing on radar. And they try to radio it, and there was nothing, and they tried to signal with the lights, there was nothing. So we opened foreign sunken and it was a - and that's what I had the gun on and my knees was a-knockin', because I was going to have to go aboard.

GARDNER: Wow. [LAUGHS]

SEEVERS: [LAUGHS] I was scared! So it was a Yugo coastal freighter is what it was. But I don't think we killed anybody. I - I really don't know anymore.

But another time, when - we would go back about once a week to Italy and take on fuel and water. Well, we probably got water over there, but no fuel. But I had the wheel watch and we's heading back for, just as calm like this floor, and the captain's up on the flying bridge and we had a voice dupe from the from the wheel. And I said, "Captain, there's a plane crash dead ahead." He said, "We didn't see it." I said, "Well I did! I just saw it." And about that time he says, "Full Speed Ahead," and we got up there and there's a B-17 laying in the water.

GARDNER: My word.

SEEVERS: And the whole crew was out on the wings. We got them all picked up before that plane sunk. I don't know how long it took it to sink. I don't remember. Wasn't very long. But they were mad, boy they were mad. And one of the rest of the men in the squadron, they called him Shorty. They said, "Shorty shot us down." And whenever the bombers went out, they test fired their guns. And Shorty was test firing his gun, but he shot 'em down. So it was shot down by one of their own, one of their own group.

GARDNER: Yeah, recognition was... it was a very dicey thing. Some men were well-trained for recognition, other were trigger-happy.

SEEVERS: Oh, yeah.

GARDNER: And well now, as you work your way up - now, did you get into the Pacific?

SEEVERS: No.

GARDNER: You never got into the Pacific.

SEEVERS: No.

GARDNER: That's interesting because I never got into the Atlantic, or the Mediterranean...

SEEVERS: Well after we left Yugoslavia - well, the first group that we took out and they pulled a raid, they come back and they had a casualty. Well, a wounded, I should say. And it was a woman! We had no

idea that it was a woman when they went out. They carried a rifle, a sidearm, a stiletto, two bandoliers of ammunition, and six hand grenades, that's - when they hit the beach, that's how they went.

GARDNER: Wow.

SEEVERS: And they would - there wasn't enough room on there, so when we took 'em out at night, they would lay in our bunks. Well, we brought them back while they lay in the bunk till they got "This was the name of that island." And after they got off one night, I crawled in my bunk, laid down, and there was a lump in there. It was a hand grenade in my bunk! [LAUGHS]

GARDNER: [LAUGHS].

SEEVERS: Now I told you we were recommended for the unit citation.

GARDNER: Yeah. Right.

SEEVERS: Okay, when the skipper - when we were in Naples, the skipper was called to the Savannah. And the old Admiral in charge was the one that had recommended us for the unit citation, but he wasn't available that time. And I found out since that he'd committed suicide.

GARDNER: Oh my word.

SEEVERS: Now he was the commander of the - 'member when they had the mock landing in England before the Normandy beachhead?

GARDNER: Yeah.

SEEVERS: And the Germans got in and sunk some? He was in charge of that, and he dwelled on it so bad that he finally committed suicide.

GARDNER: It got to him, yeah.

SEEVERS: So that's where my unit citation went.

GARDNER: There it went, yep.

SEEVERS: But after we left Yugoslavia, we went down through the Straits of Messina, back up along the coast. Then we was in on the surrender of the island of Corsica. And I can remember the capital of Corsica is Ajaccio. And they told us when we went in, they said, "Now, we don't think they'll be any fire, but there might be," so we had to man our guns when we went in. And I remember - it must have been the state house or whatever it was it up on top of the hill where the mountain. And the captain had to go up there now, he must have accepted the surrender of the island. But from there on we went and made an invasion into southern France.

GARDNER: Oh, you got into southern France!

SEEVERS: [LAUGHS]

GARDNER: My word. So that was June, July of 1944.

SEEVERS: Yeah.

GARDNER: Southern France. And you know that our great light cruiser, the USS Cincinnati, she got her battle star in the invasion of southern France.

SEEVERS: Oh, is that right?

GARDNER: Yessir. And right down here in the library, right down in the atrium, when you have some time, you go in there and you'll see silverware that was aboard the ship, and quite a nice display of USS Cincinnati memorabilia. And she really had a very interesting time... well now we're running a little short here, and I want to find out about - how long were you over there?

SEEVERS: Went over in '43 and got back in... sometime in '44.

GARDNER: 'bout a year anyway, huh.

SEEVERS: But they give the ship to the French right after the invasion of southern France, and half the crew got shipped back to the States, and a week or two later the other half the crew was shipped back. But that's about the end of my combat. [LAUGHS]

GARDNER: [LAUGHS] Well, you had some real combat! Very exciting, and... now, as a motor machinist, you were below decks a lot, weren't you?

SEEVERS: Right. But on the small boats, the motor machinist, we stood a watch in the engine room, we stood a wheel watch, we stood radar, we stood sound gear, and we stood lookout.

GARDNER: Oh golly. So you got a lot of topside exposure.

SEEVERS: Oh yeah. We could land that thing tied up to the pier or anything.

GARDNER: Sure you could do it.

SEEVERS: Now the deckhands didn't get that because they didn't go in the engine room.

GARDNER: That's right. Of course.

SEEVERS: While we was in Bizerte, we went out and we were supposed to take a convoy to Bombay, India. And we were out about a day, I guess, we were getting real close to the Suez Canal. And I had engine room watch, and one of the engines blew up. And they said I just come out of there like a shot out of a cannon.

GARDNER: [LAUGHS] Oh jeez.

SEEVERS: Just as white as a sheet!

GARDNER: Oh my goodness.

SEEVERS: The skipper says, "How much did it get hurt?" And I am not going to say what I told him - [LAUGHS] - but I went back down and those big engines, they were 500 horse GM's. And they had a habit of, when they got wore so bad, they would explode in the crankcase. And they had little explosion plugs on it, blowed them open, and then it would kick the engine back to idle. So all I had to do was kick it into gear and then it went on. But that was about my career. If we're out of time, we're out of time! [LAUGHS]

GARDNER: Well, I want to taper off here. So then you had your orders. Did you come back on the SE?

SEEVERS: No, no, it was given to the French right after the invasion.

GARDNER: Oh, it was given to the French.

SEEVERS: I come back on a liberty ship.

GARDNER: You came back on a liberty ship. I'll be darned. You came back into New York?

SEEVERS: Yeah.

GARDNER: Isn't that something. I think that's just outstanding, Leroy. And what rate did you have when you finally got out?

SEEVERS: I was a second class motor mech.

GARDNER: Second class? Boy, that's excellent. Just absolutely wonderful. Well with your - I can see with your proclivity for machinery and everything, you were the right man in the right place.

SEEVERS: Yeah.

GARDNER: And then you got all that gunnery too!

SEEVERS: [LAUGHS] Yeah! Yeah, we broke down in Bizerte, and I told the captain, I says, "I know just what we need. It's over in an aircraft hangar over there." And he says, "Well, go get it." So I went over into the aircraft hangar - it was a piece of cable for the throttles or something. And I got it, brought it back, put it on and away we went!

GARDNER: [LAUGHS]

SEEVERS: We had a terrible time with supplies, because we had to get a lot of them from the Army. If we run out of food, we had K rations. Another interesting thing, we had all of our food stored up on top side and when it got wet, all the labels would come off of it.

GARDNER: [LAUGHS] Oh gosh sakes.

SEEVERS: So if the cook went up and got a can of this and that, you may have nothing but green beans, or you may have nothing but potatoes!

GARDNER: [LAUGHS]

SEEVERS: And that's when they started stamping in the top of a can. If was green beans, it was "GB," or for the potatoes it was a P, or if it was beef it was whatever. But they stamped 'em in the in the middle of the can so you didn't have to worry then, you knowed what was in there. So there's a lot of things that they learn by experience.

GARDNER: Oh, I should say.

SEEVERS: Sometimes we'd get mail once the week. Sometimes it would be once a month. But they always had money for payday. We always got our money. But we'd have to go ashore and get stores from the Army a lot of times - most of the time, really, because the big ships didn't want to give any - any stores to those little guys. They didn't - they forgot that you was doing all the dirty work for 'em.

GARDNER: That's right, that's right. Well, there was something special about the Navy though, I'm telling you, that was just different from anybody else, of course. And it built a spirit -

SEEVERS: Right.

GARDNER: - in the men that served. And Leroy, you came back to the States, came back to Guilford, Indiana?

SEEVERS: No, I went to Boston and they sent me back to the hospital in Melville, Rhode Island, I think it was, right out of Portsmouth? And I was in the hospital for a couple of months with that leg.

GARDNER: Oh.

SEEVERS: And they finally sent me back to Great Lakes - or to Chicago, unfit for further combat, limited duty. So they give you the choice of the nearest naval station to your home. So I was sent to Crane Naval Lamination Depot at Crane, Indiana, I guess it was. And I was there for a short time. And then they said, "You're either fit for full combat or discharge." So I went from Crane - from there to Chicago for discharge. And I don't remember how long I was up there. But I know they said, "If you want discharge right now, we'll give it to you. If you want a Medical, you'll have to wait three days." I says, " Well, I've been three years, might as well wait three more days."

GARDNER: Sure.

SEEVERS: So I actually come out with a medical discharge.

GARDNER: Good for you.

SEEVERS: But I was I was discharged at two o'clock in the afternoon, and I was in downtown Chicago at State and Madison, eating a big steak, and Japan surrendered. So I was out of the Navy for three hours and Japan surrendered! [LAUGHS]

GARDNER: [LAUGHS]

SEEVERS: And then I come home and went to work.

GARDNER: Japs thought, "Well, we might as well give up! Seevers is out!" [LAUGHS]

SEEVERS: [LAUGHS] Yeah.

GARDNER: Well congratulations. Your service has been absolutely outstanding, and you tell the story so well. I love the way you express yourself. And I know that your family is going to enjoy this DVD that you get from the interview. That'll come in a couple of weeks or so. But we thank you for your wonderful service, your expression and so forth, and God bless you. [SHAKES HIS HAND]

SEEVERS: Maybe I talk too much.

GARDNER: No you don't! Nope! [LAUGHS] No, I'm sure we could go another hour.

SEEVERS: I was trying to think of the name for a Duck and I cannot.

GARDNER: I can't -

[INTERVIEW ENDS]