

Welford West Oral History Interview –JFK #1, 2/16/2005
Administrative Information

Creator: Welford West
Interviewer: Vicki Daitch
Date of Interview: February 16, 2005
Place of Interview: Hampton, Virginia
Length: 60 pp.

Biographical Note

West, Welford; Crew Member, *PT-157*. West discusses his background growing up on the water and around boats, his career with the Navy as a PT boat skipper near the Solomon Islands, and the retrieval of John F. Kennedy and his *PT-109* crew after their boat was rammed by a Japanese destroyer, among other issues.

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Welford West, recorded interview by Vicki Daitch, February 16, 2005, (page number), John F. Kennedy Oral History Program.



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Welford West

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Oral History Interview

With

WELFORD WEST

February 16, 2005
Hampton, Virginia

By Vicki Daitch

For the John F. Kennedy Library

WEST: I can get in conversation with you and talk half a day about different things on PT boats and Liebenow [William F. "Bud" Liebenow] that you wouldn't be interested in.

DAITCH: Well, what we'll do is just.... Well, first let me say I'm Vicki Daitch and I'm talking with Welford West who was in the Navy on PT boats, in the Solomon Islands, at the same time that John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] was, and participated in the rescue of the *109* crew. But first, let me just back up, you were telling me earlier that you grew up on the water. So tell me how you got involved in the PT boats to begin with.

WEST: Well, I grew up on the water. My father was a waterman, and, as a youngster, I worked with him quite a bit. And then from there I.... You can cut that off for a minute and see what we want to go into here.

DAITCH: Oh, okay. [Pause] So you didn't volunteer. I assumed, I guess I assumed that because you grew on the water....

WEST: Well, most people did. So I was on the water with my.... Are we taping now?

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: I was with my father on the water a couple, three years, and I was around the water all my life when I was a small kid. Then leaving the water, I went with the Naval Mining Wrecking Station up in Yorktown. And I left there and actually stayed on the water. I went to Florida on a yacht. A friend of mine was skipper of it, and he got me to go with him, a 56-foot sail yacht, and went to Florida for a while on it.

DAITCH: Oh, nice. Now when you were in Yorktown, were you in the Navy or you were just working there?

WEST: What?

DAITCH: When you were in Yorktown, were you in the Navy?

WEST: No, that was civilian.

DAITCH: That was civilian, okay.

WEST: I was a civilian working there. So I came back from.... I was down in Florida for about four or five months on this maiden voyage on this *White Heron*, and we came back. And to make a long story short, I got with a friend of mine. He says, "We need people up in the merchant marine on the tankers." So I thought it over for a while, drank a couple of beers, and shot the breeze. He had just come back from Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania. Had just bought himself a new convertible Ford, and we were sitting in the summertime, shooting the breeze. I thought it over for a while, and I said, "Why not?" So I went by the house, grabbed me a bag, got in the car, and took off, and we went to Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania.

DAITCH: Marcus Hook?

WEST: Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania. That's where Sun Oil's headquarters was.

DAITCH: Okay.

WEST: Sunoco.

DAITCH: Oh, okay. Now, how do you spell that?

WEST: That was when Sunoco.... What's that?

DAITCH: How do you spell Marcus...?

WEST: M-A-R-C-U-S, H-double O-K, I think. Marcus Hook.

DAITCH: Oh, Marcus Hook. Okay.

WEST: That's where the headquarters were for bringing their people into the organization on the tankers, getting the crew. Because at that time they needed them bad. And so I learned. I went on them, and I put, went on the *Eastern Sun* and put a while on it. And then I switched over later on to the *J.M. Pew*. And the *J.M. Pew* was an old tanker. Wouldn't do but 12 knots, I think. And at this time on the *J.M. Pew*, World War II started. This is interesting, to me it is. They sank a lot of ships all around us. We had.... Ships were being sunk by the German submarines off the East Coast. And one morning I counted eight tanker bows sticking out of the water. They'd been sunk the night before.

DAITCH: Really!

WEST: Right off here, right off Virginia Beach

DAITCH: Oh, my gosh!

WEST: So we got into a fog bank going up, and we were going up to Providence, Rhode Island, at that time. And we got in a fog. So they thought we had sunk out there on the *J.M. Pew*. But as it was, we were two days' late. And that was good that we were two days' late because if we hadn't been, we probably would have been one of those tankers that had gotten sunk. So we got into Providence, and the Coast Guard made us paint the ship all over gray, all the varnish work and everything. And we had everybody painting on the boat except the skipper and the chief engineer. And the temperature was 10 degrees. You had to put kerosene in the paint so that you could put the brush in it.

DAITCH: Yes? Wow!

WEST: You want me to go through all this?

DAITCH: Yes. I mean I think this is interesting.

WEST: I don't think it will take lone. But anyway, I'm going to get to a point there with the *J.M. Pew* in a minute. So I made a few other trips after December 7th when the war started.

DAITCH: Now did they.... When the Coast Guard had you painting it, is that just for safety? Or were they sort of appropriating it for government use?

WEST: Safety. It was safety. The Coast Guard would inspect you. You'd get underway going out and then go all around. If they found a spot on that ship where there would be a glare, glass, white, it went gray, everything gray. So I made a couple more trips on the *J.M. Pew*. They were gonna send the ship over to the West

Coast, and I didn't want to go over there. So when we came back in New York Harbor one trip, I got off there. And then I came home for about a week after that. I said I'll get me a fast tanker that can outrun these German submarines. Because the submarines were running them down on the water, on the top, and sinking them with their deck guns. They didn't have to fire their torpedoes.

DAITCH: Really!

WEST: Because they could do 18, 20 knots, and we had tankers that couldn't do but 12 knots.

DAITCH: No kidding!

WEST: So anyway, I got off there and, like I say, I come home. I went back....

DAITCH: When you say home, where was home?

WEST: I went to Virginia. I was born and raised about 25 miles from here in Gloucester County.

DAITCH: Oh, okay.

WEST: Gloucester County.

DAITCH: On the shore, on the ocean?

WEST: Right on the water, close to the water, yes. On the York River. Yorktown, York River. I lived just a few minutes from Yorktown. So come back home for about a week, and I went back up to Marcus Hook, PA, that was what I was just telling you about, to the Chester Arms Hotel. The company had the Chester Arms Hotel there. So I went back to the hotel and was getting me a fast tanker. So I went into a bar. I knew where these people used to hang out around there, so I went into a beer joint. And when I walked in the door, all these people were coming and grabbing me around the neck and hugging me, all these seamen. Well, seamen don't normally hug one another.

DAITCH: Right. [Laughter]

WEST: So they had a reason for it. They thought I was on the *J.M. Pew*, I didn't know it had been sunk.

DAITCH: Wow!

WEST: Coming out of Aruba Harbor. And they had had to hire about, over half of the crew, they were a green crew, didn't even know how to launch the lifeboats.

DAITCH: Oh, no.

WEST: So the ship went down so quick, out of 30-some people only four got off the ship. And that's the ship I was supposed to have been on.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: If I hadn't gotten off in New York....

DAITCH: Oh, my goodness.

WEST: So then when this happened, I started thinking about it, and I said, I'm going to go back home and think this thing over. After they sunk my ship. So I did. And I come back, and I went to work at the Naval Mining Weapons Station, the same place I just told you I worked, at Yorktown.

DAITCH: Right.

WEST: And I went into the torpedo shop. And so I worked in the torpedo shop for a while. And then World War II was jumping, and I either had to go back in the merchant marine or go into service of some kind. If I went back in the merchant marine.... I mean they don't put you in the Navy or the Army, I knew it. Well, I'd always made my mind up a long time ago I wasn't going in the Army because I didn't like to dig foxholes. I like the water better.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: So, after I worked there for a while, I said, Well, you know.... They sent some guys in there, some torpedo men in the Navy were working in the shop. We got talking about it. And I said, Well, why don't I just go in the Navy? So I went up to Richmond, and they went up with me, and some friends of mine. One of them was a first-class petty officer, torpedo man. And I went in the Navy. When I went in the Navy, I went in as a third-class petty officer, which normally you don't do that. You go in as seaman, which is a big jump. The commander of the torpedo shop, Commander Roach [Francis Roach?], gave me a letter of recommendation to give me the highest thing you could give me. I had not been in the shop that long, so they gave me third-class petty officer. I went in the Navy third-class petty officer torpedo man. That's how I became a torpedo man.

Then I went to all these schools. I went to boot camp in Norfolk, the last boot camp they had there, for about four months or whatever it was in the boot camp there. And then after boot camp was over, we were all getting our orders where we were going to go in the Navy. So I get this document that says report to Melville PT Boat Training School.

DAITCH: And there were no options. Were you given a list of things that you could choose from?

WEST: No, that was the first I knew about it. I didn't even know what PT boats was talking about. And all these guys are telling me, "Man, look at 40-30-40. You're going into PT boats." I said, "What is that?" He said, "You're supposed to volunteer to go in that." I said, "I ain't volunteered for nothing." So I go to Melville, and torpedo school, torpedo boat training for the crews of PT boats.

DAITCH: Now was that when, somewhere in the middle of 1942?

WEST: It was in May of '42.

DAITCH: Okay.

WEST: Then they sent me to torpedo school in Newport, Rhode Island. And I came back to Melville to train, four months' training. And going through that school you had to learn everyone's job. If you were a torpedo man, you had to know how to run the engines, run the radio, you had to have some navigation. If everybody in the boat got killed except you and you're in the middle of the ocean, you're supposed to bring the boat back in by yourself.

DAITCH: Wow!

WEST: That was the idea.

DAITCH: Yes. Now did you have classes with...? I mean I suppose normally officers and enlisted people don't mingle a whole lot. But in that situation officers had to learn the same things, right?

WEST: Yes, they did the same things. Right. They got the same training we got and more.

DAITCH: Okay.

WEST: Well, they had more training. It was more in depth on probably navigation and those types of things. But so far as handling boats or doing anything else, the school was practically the same. I would say some parts of it they went more deeply for the officers. But that's the way I got into PT boats.

DAITCH: It seems like a natural thing with your experience with boats and the water and torpedoes.

WEST: Yes, just the way it happens. Then what happened, went through school there, four months' training at Melville. And then they sent me to New York, and we were put into squadrons and commissions in New York, the Navy Yard, that is. I went there, and I had a chance to go in either Squadron 8 or Squadron 9, either one I wanted. I'll give you a little story here about PT boats, if you want it.

DAITCH: Absolutely.

WEST: Pertaining to where they started PT boats. I don't know how much you want. What PT boats were, why the school was set up, and why they went large. When the war started in the Philippines, they had a few PT boats out there.

MacArthur [Douglas MacArthur] was out there in charge of the whole thing. And Lieutenant Bulkeley [John D. Bulkeley] and Lieutenant Kelly [Robert B. Kelly] were out there. The reason I'm putting these two people in is because Kelly ended up being my CO of the squadron 9. Bulkeley had Squadron 8. They were both lieutenants. And I was.... I chose to go with Kelly in Squadron 9.

DAITCH: How come?

WEST: I really don't now. I just felt like I'd rather go to the South Pacific than go to the Southwestern Pacific.

DAITCH: Oh, okay.

WEST: New Guinea is where they went, and we went the other way. But going back onto what I just said about out in the Philippines, a lot of people don't know this. And I think it should be put in here if you don't already have it. And that's about PT boats and MacArthur. Are you familiar with that?

DAITCH: Something about them bringing him off the islands?

WEST: Well, really, if you stop and think about it, they brought.... A PT boat brought Bulkeley and Kelly; Bulkeley was the skipper, Kelly was the exec on this boat. I think it was three boats, it may be more, they had that did this. They got together one night, and he had no way of getting out of there at that time. They didn't know how to get him and his family out, MacArthur. I'll go so far, but maybe I shouldn't. But I'm so much for PT boats, I'm going to make a statement.

DAITCH: Go ahead.

WEST: That maybe if PT boats hadn't been there at the time they were there, MacArthur might not have gotten out of the Philippines. He could have been captured by the Japanese.

DAITCH: That would have been a disaster.

WEST: The PT boats brought him out, and he rendezvoused with a submarine, and they took him to Australia. And when this happened, and when Bulkeley and Kelly came back to the States, they opened this school. And that was the explosion of PT boats.

DAITCH: Because they'd proven so useful.

WEST: Before then there was such a small amount. Then they went all over the world. I wanted to put that in there.

DAITCH: Yes, that's interesting. And it was because they could.... Obviously they had some very useful features that they were able to sort of sneak into some places.

WEST: They rendezvoused with a submarine, and he went to Australia with his family. And Bulkeley took Squadron 8 to the South Pacific. Kelly took Squadron 9. I mean the Southwest Pacific. Kelly took Squadron 9 to the South Pacific. And I ended up on *PT-157* with Liebenow.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: I'm up to that point.

DAITCH: Can I ask you a question before we go into that?

WEST: You can ask me anything you want?

DAITCH: How come the PT boats were able to rescue MacArthur? I mean what was it, that they were not detectable by the Japanese?

WEST: Well, it's where they were located. PT boats had a way of camouflaging and hiding themselves in the daytime. They had a way of hiding the boats under trees and all kinds of ways, see. But they didn't have many boats left. So they had to get him out, and I don't know of any other way they had of getting him out of that. Maybe they did. But that's what they chose.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: And their big chance from going out, they didn't know whether they would get out of there or not. They took off at night, and they didn't know where the mine fields were or whatever. They just took off and whoosh, that was it. And they made it. And that was the beginning of the PT boat buildup. When they came back, they set the schools up. And Bulkeley and Kelly were putting Squadron 8 and Squadron 9 together at the same time in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. That's where I went. After I went through school at Melville, I went and picked Squadron 9. So we put the squadron in commission, and then we took off to Panama on a tanker deck. They put the PT boats on tanker decks with about six of us on a tanker, on the deck. And they clamped you down and took us to Panama for a shakedown cruise down there, in other words training; that was our training, four months' training in Panama. And we trained with the fleet and with the carriers and with all

of our ships going through Panama, all the maneuvers that PT boats go through: laying smoke screens and going through and making torpedo runs and all the stuff the way PT boats operate we did with our fleet. When the ships would come through, we'd go out and attack them for training, when they'd come through Panama going out into the South Pacific. We would go out and make all kinds of runs on them and whatnot. We did that for four months training.

DAITCH: Now what kinds of things...? Can you talk a little bit about...?

WEST: Am I going too fast?

DAITCH: No. It's interesting stuff. But I want to know more. What kinds of runs would you typically do? I mean, for example, are you approaching a ship broadside normally or from the back or the front?

WEST: Any way you can. Most of them broadside. Well, let's say the ship is going down here. If you were doing a daytime run, we'd have a smoke screen generator there on the boat. If you were making this type of thing, you would run, run and make a smoke screen generator, you'd take it and put up that screen. [Pause for phone ringing] So let's see, where were we?

DAITCH: You were telling me about the smoke screens.

WEST: Let's say there was a ship we wanted to attack in the daytime. If you were going to do it, the best time you did this it was nighttime. But it'll give you an idea. You'd lay a smoke screen or make a smoke screen. The ship's over here. You make a fast run. The boat's run 60 miles an hour. And we'll run it then, we come in back here, and go back through the smoke screen and make your run on the ship.

DAITCH: Oh, okay.

WEST: They wouldn't see you until you'd be right there. And you hope you've gotten by without being shot at, being sunk.

DAITCH: Right. And at 60 miles an hour, it's likely that you're going to make it.

WEST: You have to slow down a little bit when you fired the torpedoes because on account of the shock from them when you.... 22 ounces of black powder was in that thing, and you pushed a button there, and there was a sudden jolt, so you had to slow the boat down some when you shot it. Then you went. But we had all kinds of maneuvers we could do with them. I remember, you know.... I won't go into that yet. So that was.... When we got through our training and shakedown cruise in Panama, we were loaded back on a tanker and taken out to New Caledonia.

DAITCH: And you're already with Liebenow on *157*.

WEST: Right.

DAITCH: Through the whole training.

WEST: I got on with Liebenow and *157* in New York, and I stayed on that boat for a year and a half. He got off before I did because he had a football knee, and his knee went out on him. He got off a little before I did, off the boat. But I was on it until I come back to the States, I was on that one boat.

DAITCH: Wow.

WEST: And we had four or five people that was on that all that time until we picked up other people. But then they took us to New Caledonia, and they put us off. We were there for about a week or so. And then Kelly decided that we were going to go on our own power to Guadalcanal. Tulaghi was our torpedo boat base within sight of Guadalcanal. You could see Guadalcanal. And back then the Japanese were still making runs into Guadalcanal with their fleet. They were still coming in, bombing. We took Guadalcanal over, but they were coming in, and they were bombing Guadalcanal, bringing the fleets and ships. So that's where we started our action, at Guadalcanal. I'm going to tell you how we got there. The reason I'm saying this is because we were the first squadron to ever go all the way from New Caledonia to Guadalcanal on our own power. He took the squadron of 12 boats, and we went from island to island until we got to Guadalcanal.

DAITCH: I was going to say that's a long way for a small boat.

WEST: Island to island. And you had to figure the fuel out so your fuel would not run out. We ran at about 1400rpms, and that's a good fuel mileage. So we went out the first night. The next morning we got to the first island for refueling. Some of the boats ran out of fuel at the mouth of the harbor. That's how close the fuel was figured.

DAITCH: Yes. Wow! Wow! That was lucky.

WEST: Oh, yes. I forget how many islands we hit before we got to Guadalcanal. We were the first squadron that ever did this. They took them up with larger boats and fuel on the way for the ships. But we did it. Kelly was like a daredevil like. He was an Annapolis graduate, and he was a good officer. He liked doing things like some whales hadn't done. We went up to Tulaghi where the base was. Then we were there for a while. Then we left there and went on the invasion of Rendova. That was the first real action we got into really was at that point.

DAITCH: Yes. Now what happened there?

WEST: A lot. We went there; they were still shelling.

DAITCH: Hang on just a second. [Pause]

WEST: We went on the invasion of Rendova. That was.... The Japanese didn't want to give that up. And so we were, that was our base for going out and attacking the Japanese ships or whatever they had there. And we had 155mm guns firing over three miles of water to wherever it was, about three miles, to Munda Airfield. And finally we were shelling Munda Airfield 24 hours a day because we wanted to get that airfield to put our planes on, trying to get the Japanese. Then we invaded the New Georgia group there at that time. That was an island where the Japanese had their runway. I mean had their runway where we wanted to put the runway in there. So the Japanese were trying to knock out the 155's. They're large guns sitting up there, shelling over the water. The dishes were rattling in the galley every time they fired them 24 hours a day. So they invaded the New Georgia group of islands. Our people invaded that. And then the Japanese decide they're going to send some destroyers in to knock these guns out. And they were right there where we were. We were in a harbor down here; the guns were sitting up here. So they would come in and shell and knock those guns out.

DAITCH: And those were up over Tulaghi?

WEST: No, this was at Rendova.

DAITCH: Rendova, oh. Right, right, right.

WEST: Rendova.

DAITCH: They're on your island. They're on Rendova where you were. Okay.

WEST: Yes. So we took over that part of Rendova, the marines and soldiers. And the Seabees had set these guns up and were firing them, shooting at the Japanese. And they sent these destroyers. We heard that these.... No, we didn't either. We didn't know they were coming in. We thought that they might try that. So they put some of our boats as guard. Water going through like this, Rendova's over here, shelling over. But they would come in from the ocean to shell. So we were, they put us out on patrol across these places to keep the Japanese from coming in. Well, that was one of the worst battles that we were in. Yes, we almost got sunk. We ended up with 65 holes in the boat, and they shot the central engine out. But when they were coming in, we saw them coming in, these Japanese destroyers. They were wide open then. They were pretty fast. We saw one coming in way out there. So we started going out towards him, and we attacked that one. But we didn't know there was one up ahead of him. It was so dark you couldn't see nothing. Because you've got the background of an island, you can't see; we didn't have no radar.

DAITCH: Right.

WEST: You couldn't see with your eyes, and you couldn't see from here to there. And anyway, I'll put it to you this way: That destroyer was ahead of the one that we saw. We got tangled up with that one. And we came so close to him that we came within a few feet of that Jap destroyer.

DAITCH: Oh, my gosh!

WEST: And we got away from that one, moved away. Just made a turn and got away from that destroyer. He came up over on the other side of us. And this one that was coming in got on this side. See, he was trying to get rid of the PT boats because we had four torpedoes in, and we could sink them.

DAITCH: Right.

WEST: They knew that. And I don't know how many they brought in. They brought two or three destroyers in; I know it was two involved because we got between the two destroyers. And then they had us in the crossfire. So when they get you, there's nothing you can do. We were running at about a speed of around 1400, and we kept at that speed. I'm at the wheel of the boat, and Liebenow is standing alongside, and he's telling me what to do and so forth, and to keep the same course, and we'll keep the same speed. So I was keeping that course. In the meantime we're getting shot up. I couldn't see it, but one of the guys, they looked and saw a Japanese up in the crow's nest shooting down on top of us.

DAITCH: Oh, my gosh.

WEST: And what we're trained to do, while we're sitting like this, we're going to run. We aren't going to change course because we're not getting sunk. So we'll keep this course. What got me was up in front of us they had something that's got 20mm guns; shells were this big around and about that long. Very explosive. And they'd set us up on a crossfire. And we're coming up to this crossfire, and I was praying that something would happen before we got to the crossfire. We couldn't go anywhere. You had to go right into it. If you went into it, that was it. You know the tanks had 3,000 gallons of gas, and you were going to go in like an explosion. Like Kennedy's boat went up. So I said, I told Liebenow afterwards, when we talked about it, I said, "You know thank God there was a miracle." I said "That when we get up to the 20mm crossfire, they would run out of ammunition." This destroyer and this destroyer. They didn't know where we were at. But they put us in the crossfire, they figure if the ones back here didn't get us, they would. When we got up to them, they ran out of ammunition. I said, "Oh, my God." Thank God. And then all of a sudden they had started their crossfire again up ahead of us. And now we've got to go up to that one. I said, "Well, we're not going to make it through that one." But I'm still praying. God, if you ever help me now.... And we got up to the second one, so help me God, the same thing happened.

DAITCH: Wow!

WEST: We got up to it. Their drums only had 20-some rounds of ammunition in each one. Whatever they were. As well as I can remember, they had 20mm. But anyway, we got through that one. And we knew our motor'd been hit, we smelled gas coming out of the engine room. We got the motor mechs out of the engine room because the boat was going to blow up. We're looking at it, and it could blow up anytime. And we went in this darkness and got out of there. We didn't know where the Japanese were. And then all of a sudden we went out there and got out of the way of them. And made a turn to the port, up there. And then we saw this Japanese destroyer going out. Now we'd accomplished our mission. We almost got sunk, but they did not fire a round at those 155's on the hill.

DAITCH: Really!

WEST: That was our mission. And we saw that one going out. So we took off after him and decided, we fired two torpedoes, and we got a hit and a sinking.

DAITCH: Really!

WEST: Yes.

DAITCH: Wow!

WEST: Yes. I know Admiral Halsey [William "Bull" Halsey].... Liebenow went one time and picked him up and brought him over, and he had told him that we got credit for sinking that destroyer. So we were in pretty bad shape by then, and we had 65 holes in the boat. And one bullet went into the torpedo tube. And if that would've exploded, that would've been a pretty bad thing. It didn't explode. It went in and lodged in between the tube and the torpedo. And when we fired the torpedo, it split the tube, and then it went, the bullet, went out of the tube with the torpedo.

DAITCH: The other end?

WEST: Out of it when we fired the torpedo out.

DAITCH: Wow!

WEST: So that was that. So then we had to, the next day, we had to go back to Tulaghi and load up two more torpedoes. But that was the first real action we were in. We saw a lot of action afterwards, but that was a bugger.

DAITCH: Oh.

WEST: Nobody got killed. And it was by the grace of God we got out of that one. Because this was the Japanese were shooting at one another with their own guns. Because they couldn't get the 5-inch guns down on us, we were so close to them.

DAITCH: Oh, yes.

WEST: The ship, see.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: We use their small arms where 55, 50, and 20mm assembly [Inaudible]. That's what they shot us up with. But anyway, after all this commotion, I guess, they took off. So we'd better get out of here before we go get sunk. So we run them off.

DAITCH: Yes. That's amazing.

WEST: That was the first battle. And then from then on we were operating out of Rendova. And we were patrolling on all the islands, New Georgia and up in Kolombangara Island, up in the area where Kennedy was sunk, for Jap barges mostly all the time.

DAITCH: And your job was to just try to, if you see them, you try to shoot a torpedo at them?

WEST: Barges have a shallow draft for torpedoes. You know what I mean?

DAITCH: They're not too far into the water.

WEST: They're not far in the water, shallow draft. So we couldn't waste a torpedo on a barge.

DAITCH: Oh, okay.

WEST: But we had a 37mm gun on the bow that was taken from a World War I anti-tank gun we put on the bow of our boat. It would fire a long ways. That was my gun when we were fighting Jap barges.

DAITCH: Now were you.... Is something like that likely to sink a barge? Or you're just trying to harass them to keep them from supplying...?

WEST: It could do both.

DAITCH: Really?

WEST: A 37mm [Inaudible] with a 20mm, they put a hole that big. The 37 would put one this big.

DAITCH: Right. You're talking maybe six or eight inches.

WEST: But the Jap barges were full of armor, too. So we did different things, and I can tell you some of the battles we were in if you want me to tell you.

DAITCH: Yes, I think it's interesting. Now, your experience is not going to be identical to Kennedy's because obviously he was doing different things, but....

WEST: He was doing the same things.

DAITCH: Yes. Now when did.... He was there after Rendova. He didn't get there.... Kennedy, he was at Rendova?

WEST: Kennedy, he hadn't arrived yet.

DAITCH: Okay.

WEST: No, he came in a little later on. Uh huh. But we patrolled, we averaged probably about three nights a week and sometimes every night.

DAITCH: And you're talking overnight from dusk until dawn?

WEST: Yes. We'd go out at sunset and come in at sunrise, all night.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: And we were patrolling areas where Jap barges were and looking for them. They were moving their troops around in the barges at nighttime, and we were trying to locate them. We did other things. Well, we escorted different boats. I remember one night we escorted some boats with supplies for the Marines who were on the New Georgia Group. The Marines had gone in there, and they had soldiers on one side and marines on the other, and they were putting the Japs in a squeeze. What happened is the marines pushed the Japanese into where the soldiers.... And they had all kinds of problems over there. And then they got entrapped, and they had no food and all. So we escorted some boats up the Kula Gulf, and that's where Kolombangara Island.... Kolombangara Island is where like the *109* got sunk, on the other side of the island. We were over here on this big Kula Gulf. There were some big battles fought there where destroyers got sunk and cruisers. In the same place where we're talking about now, Kula Gulf.

This night we were escorting these boats. And we had a maneuver to do with them if they were attacked. And the Japanese floatplanes came out and started to attack the supply boats. The job was to get these supply boats through to the Marines so they had food and

water because they were in pretty bad shape. Up there in Kula Gulf on New Georgia. So they started dropping bombs. And they dropped a bomb so close to one of the supply boats that the water came on the deck. Well, once they did that, then we started going around in circles, two of us boats, the 154 boat and the 157 that I was on. This is a maneuver you do. Go around in circles and have the plane to come after you. We're putting up a wake. They can see it, and you want them to see it, you want them to come after you.

DAITCH: Oh, ok, so this is at night, and you want them to come after you.

WEST: Get away. Pull the planes away from the boats because they're going to sink those boats.

DAITCH: So you're creating.... It's at night, it's after dark, and you're creating a wake that is phosphorous and that they can see.

WEST: Because those boats will go get sunk. And that was our mission is to keep them from getting sunk. So we weren't loud about it really because we had a maneuver which was good for that. What we could do is go around in circles ready to shoot. We could fire at them in circles, see. You've got all your firepower is going like this at that plane. That was the maneuver.

DAITCH: Oh, yes. So wherever you are in the circle you just start point to the plane.

WEST: We're going in circles, two boats, this one here. We're firing at this plane. But there's a catch to this one because we don't fire at nighttime into planes unless we have to.

DAITCH: Right, because it might be ours.

WEST: You give your position away.

DAITCH: Oh, yes, yes.

WEST: If you fire at nighttime. So this Japanese pilot, he got real mad at us because the boats were going through, and we were running around down on the water, and he couldn't.... He was trying to sink us. So he figured that, then we started making strafing runs with this machine gun from the sea plane, and we're trying to keep him away from these boats all the time. And the faster you go, the farther your wake is. My boat might be here, and the wake might be across the street over there, way back behind us. So he doesn't know where you are. He sees the wake, but he doesn't know where the boat is.

DAITCH: Right.

WEST: So then this one special time.... Everyone has a certain job. Mine was in that thing to get on the smoke screen generator and lay puffs of smoke to confuse him. So I was laying puffs of smoke, and we were running tip top speed. This Jap plane's coming up on our stern, and he's trying to find where the boat is. And every time I laid a puff of smoke, he'd drop a bomb in it.

DAITCH: Wow!

WEST: So finally he dropped so many bombs on the puffs of smoke I was laying behind us that he ran out of bombs.

DAITCH: Yeah!

WEST: So he got mad. He said, Well, I'll attack them with my machine gun. The moon was shining bright as day, the moon was just as bright. He saw us and he started to strafe us. Oh, man! That's [Inaudible] turret on a 20mm. Nobody had time to say nothing. The minute Smittie saw that plane, he let him have it with that 20mm gun. And that plane went on away, and we didn't see him anymore. But that was the type of mission the PT boats did.

DAITCH: Yes. Wow. So you were in many ways, you're a target.

WEST: Oh, yes, yes. Yes, oh, yes. Definitely. Most PT boats were a target most all the time when you're out there with these people in this type of thing. You try not to, but we had a lot of maneuvers we could do to confuse them. The smoke screen generator was a big factor. You could use it for a lot of things. The smoke screen generator, if we hadn't had it that night, we could have been in big trouble. Run out of tape?

[END SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

[BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

WEST: We went to other islands and places, but I don't know much of it you want.

DAITCH: Well, I think it was during the time that you were at Rendova that Kennedy probably showed up. Do you....

WEST: He showed up, yes.

DAITCH: Do you have any recollection of him in particular or when he showed up or the circumstances under which he showed up? Or the *109*, not him in particular.

WEST: Have you read anything on.... Have you read much stuff on him?

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: I'm sure you have.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: I'm sure, matter of fact, you have a question. But I meant how much have you...?

DAITCH: I haven't read a....

WEST: The reason I'm asking this, I don't know how much I'm supposed to tell you. But I've read stuff on Kennedy, a bunch. I talked to some of his crew and they liked him very much as a skipper.

DAITCH: Yes, I have. Let me turn these off for a second. [Pause]

WEST: We went to.... I would think that, well, you were asking me about Kennedy. I can read about two or three pages of one of these books and tell you exactly what he....

DAITCH: Yes. But you know what? What I want to know....

WEST: You want to know.... You want it from me.

DAITCH: Your--if you had any.... And if you didn't, that's okay.

WEST: Okay. Well, I'll just say what happened.

DAITCH: Okay.

WEST: Kennedy showed up there at Rendova, and he took one of the boats over, which was *109*, the skipper of *109*.

DAITCH: Now somebody else had had that boat.

WEST: Yes.

DAITCH: Okay.

WEST: Yes, somebody had had it before. There's all a story behind all this stuff. But anyway, I'm telling you the bottom line.

DAITCH: Yes. Well, from what you....

WEST: He took the boat over, and we heard that Kennedy was coming in. Well, we knew about that time that Kennedy was a son of the ambassador to England. I mean we didn't know much else.

DAITCH: Had you ever met him at Melville or anyplace like that?

WEST: No, I didn't. Actually the only time I really met Kennedy was--I'm kind of getting ahead of myself here.

DAITCH: Well, let's just back up then. I'm just asking questions.

WEST: When I met him was after we picked him and his crew up.

DAITCH: Oh, it was? Okay. So he was just around, he was just another PT boat skipper.

WEST: Yes. Well, the idea was.... Another thing, when you're on PT boats, you don't mingle too much with many other people. You're so busy patrolling, working on the boat, diving torpedo tubes, cleaning guns, and checking the motors, and the crews.... Then the officers had meetings. They got together more. Liebenow I'm sure could tell you a lot about Kennedy because he was around him a lot.

DAITCH: Right.

WEST: But anyway, I didn't know Kennedy other than what I heard, and it was all good. I mean I heard he was a good skipper, and the people, the crew liked him.

DAITCH: Really?

WEST: I heard he was a little bit like a daredevil like. He didn't mind taking chances. Something like Liebenow. And so I can go into the time we were in the battle and he was in it if you want to.

DAITCH: Yes, actually. Because that was another sort of big battle.

WEST: That's another thing. It was. We got word from intelligence that there were some destroyers who were up to Kolombangara Island to supply the troops. They had 10,000 troops on Kolombangara Island. So they got their meeting together and went over, everybody deciding what they would do. So we had 14 PT boats in. And this is the night that they were going to come up and supply them. So we were supposed to go up and attack these destroyers. So we all.... Our boat was in.... The boats went in as three: one, two, three. And then you were set up to attack to go in with ships and so forth.

DAITCH: Sort of like when geese fly or something.

WEST: To give them more firepower and so forth. Our boat was . . . I think Kennedy was up ahead of our boat that night. And Brantingham [Henry J. Brantingham] was in charge of that. Brantingham was the exec of the squadron. He was an Annapolis graduate. And we went up to attack them. We got up there, and it was so dark that it was almost unbelievable. You couldn't see nothing. You couldn't hardly see the bow of the boat. And so we're going; we know where we're going. We're going into where they're supposed to be coming through. And all of a sudden someone says, There's a Jap ship coming through a certain place. They're coming up in a certain area. Now we've got to decide what position to get into to attack these ships. So we went in there, and this strait comes through there. And we went on through to the other end, and we didn't run into any destroyers, Jap destroyers. We didn't see any. So we went on down to the other end of The Slot there where they were supposed to come in. And some how they had gotten in, it looked like, and left their supplies off, and were coming out. And that's when we find out about it. They were coming out, and we knew exactly where they were. We were just laying out there waiting for them to come by that area so we could fire torpedoes at them, because we knew they had to go through.

DAITCH: Right. If they got in, they've got to come back out.

WEST: There we were. So we were sitting over in the edge of The Slot. I could show you a map.

DAITCH: Yes, actually....

WEST: You give me that map over there, and I'll show you an area where, right there. I'll show you on this map where the battle was, where we were sitting, and the whole nine yards, if I can get the page here. But anyway, I can tell you this: While we were waiting for them to come through, all of a sudden we saw a big explosion not too far from where we were. That was the area where they were coming out. We found out later--we thought it was one of our boats torpedoes hitting a Jap destroyer. It was *109* being hit. So, see, the destroyers had gone through. See that's Kolombangara Island. The destroyers were going through like this. That's why he was hit direct on. He was hit here. So we're sitting right here over in this area, our boat is. And we don't know where anybody else is. It's so dark you only know where you are.

DAITCH: So none of the boats can tell where each other is.

WEST: And you don't want to be talking on the radio too much. So when those destroyers went through here, for everyone in here, we backed in to get away from them. We saw them coming through. You could just barely see....
Nighttime you can see the stern and the bow of a ship. And we had a thing we used to gauge the ship, and you look through it, and sight through it. You get the bow and the stern weight,

and you try to fire the torpedo and devise what speed it's going at. And then you fire the torpedo ahead of him naturally so he'll run into it.

DAITCH: Right. To calculate when he'll run into it. Yes.

WEST: So what we did, we fired.... It could have been the same destroyer that sunk *109*.

DAITCH: Really!

WEST: Yes. I don't know. I don't know if anybody knows that or not. Those destroyers were coming through here. And there are all these boats. And so we fired two torpedoes at that Jap destroyer going through here. But we didn't get any reaction from explosions. We used Mark 8 torpedoes. It's possible we could've hit one of them, and it didn't work. Because there were 32 torpedoes fired that night.

DAITCH: And either none of them hit or none of them worked?

WEST: None went off.

DAITCH: Oh, my gosh.

WEST: See, they were old torpedoes. They're Mark 8's. Later on we got Mark 13's which were aircraft torpedoes. They were good ones. But that's what we had that night. And you can read all the books. You'll read some of the stuff in them I'm telling you about, the Mark 8 torpedoes. But we had a good shot at him. Then we're setting there waiting to see what he was going to do, waiting to see if the torpedoes are going to hit him. Nothing is happening. He's gone. So we just sat there. That was it. And so we're waiting for him to fire at us. We were waiting for him to put a searchlight on us. But they didn't want to do that either because they didn't want to give their position away.

DAITCH: Right. Yes.

WEST: So that's what they had at Guadalcanal. A lot of PT boats got sunk at Guadalcanal. The Japs sunk them with flashes, searchlights, at Guadalcanal there. That was another thing before we got there.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: But that's what happened there. And we thought the explosion of *PT 109*, we thought it was a Japanese destroyer being hit by one of our torpedoes.

DAITCH: Yes. Not so.

WEST: A lot of stuff went on back here we didn't know about because we were up in this area, see.

DAITCH: Right. And you had several boats that were supposed to be together in here, but you just got separated?

WEST: We got separated. If you got separated, it was a mess.

DAITCH: Yes. Is that usual?

WEST: Well, these destroyers knew where they were going. They were going to go through here. They knew there were PT boats in that area, I'm sure, by the time they saw what was going on around there. But these destroyers had been up; this is the line here. That's where they went. And I said, That line's not right as far as I'm concerned. They can move that line over here would be closer. We were sitting over here.

DAITCH: Closer to the tip of Kolombangara.

WEST: He was keeping as close to Kolombangara as he could, yes. See, that way he wouldn't give his position away.

DAITCH: Oh, the closer he is to the island, the island's a background and you can't see them.

WEST: Right. When you're looking at a ship at an island, you can't even see the ship.

DAITCH: Yes. Oh, boy.

WEST: You can only see it moving away. That's what happened, as I was just saying, when we got shot up so much. That's the reason it happened. But that's what happened that night. And then after that everybody knows that happened. Then the next day we went back to Rendova. We'd fired two torpedoes, so we had to get two more to put on the boat.

DAITCH: Now how come nobody went back to see what happened to *109*?

WEST: That is a big question. That is a big question in all those books I've read. That's a question in all the books. And that's what made Kennedy.... He got disturbed about. They should've come back. But, see, that's when you're assuming something. And I was with the Army Corps of Engineers for quite a few years. I retired from the Army Corps of Engineers. In the Corps of Engineers you never say I assume something.

DAITCH: Oh!

WEST: In the Corps of Engineers, we don't know, we don't ever use assume. They'll never use that word "assume" in the Corps of Engineers.

DAITCH: Yes. I'll bet.

WEST: As Su Me. So anyway, they tried to but that explosion, as big it was, it was a terrible explosion. See, we were sitting down here quite a ways when he was up there.

DAITCH: But there was another boat closer to him, right?

WEST: Oh, yes. There were boats all around that night.

DAITCH: Yes. So somebody would have been closer and would have seen.

WEST: They figured that, yes.... The boats should have went back in that area. See, everybody's going by the orders of Warfield [Thomas G. Warfield] sitting in a foxhole up in Rendova, telling you what to do.

DAITCH: Right. He's not out there.

WEST: He's not.... As I say, we used to call him "Foxhole" Warfield. He was a commander. He was over the whole thing, the whole operation. But now Brantingham was over the operation up in here with the boats right up in there. But Warfield's sitting there and telling you what to do. But anyway, what happened was some.... Nobody knew it, but it should have been done. Nobody told anybody to do it. So nobody took it on their own to do it. And everybody went back to Rendova saying, boy, *109* is to the bottom, and all the crew's gone with it. That was what everybody assumed.

DAITCH: Yes, yes. Well, the people who were close, apparently it was this huge fireball, and they just figured nobody could survive.

WEST: They all said, well, nobody could have survived it. They were wrong.

DAITCH: Yes, a lot of.... It's amazing how many people did survive.

WEST: It is. It is very amazing. And Kennedy has got a lot to do with it, a lot to do with that. He had a lot to do with that. He was a very brave man, and he did a bang-up job on that. So we went back to the base the next morning. And then we kept our patrols going. But we never did make a patrol in this area, from the time that he was sunk and the time that he was rescued.

DAITCH: Isn't that odd.

WEST: He swam out here from this island, from this one, he swam out nighttime into this over here with a waterproof light and risked his life every time he did it. He swam out there because the boats would come through on patrol. We did it all the time. We patrolled this area all the time. It's a big area. So that's.... Kennedy said in one of the books I've got, he says, I mean they should have done it. Some of the other people will say that Kennedy thought this, which he was right. He did it. It was one of the officers of one of the boats that he really blamed for it. It's in one of the books.

DAITCH: Oh, really! Yes. I had never seen anywhere that he was particularly bitter about it. But he wasn't that kind of guy.

WEST: Yes. But I'm going to read some stuff to you to tell you why. He felt.... He didn't put a lot of it in there. But, no, what they're saying in the story is that he felt that they should have done that.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: They should've stayed there. They shouldn't have took off and went back to Rendova. They should have stayed there and looked around to see what they could find in the water. It was so dark you couldn't see nothing. It was unbelievable how dark it was that night. It was the darkest night I've ever seen. The clouds, where the clouds were. And you couldn't see nothing.

DAITCH: It kind of explains how.... Because there's that other question about, you know, how could you not see a destroyer coming at you?

WEST: The only way you could see the destroyer coming at you was to see the wake. He probably didn't see the ship.

DAITCH: Oh, so if he had the front end coming at him, they wouldn't have seen the wake.

WEST: Well, this destroyer I think was coming at him so fast. I think them Japs had decided that these PT boats are out there, so we're going to go through as fast as we can go. And they were fast destroyers. They were going about 35 knots. And when they hit him, he was moving, that destroyer was. They wanted to get through and get out of there as fast as they could because they knew there were some PT boats in there.

DAITCH: Yes. The other question was that I've seen people....

WEST: That's why they were so afraid of PT boats, because they knew they could do a lot of damage, even if they did have bad torpedoes.

DAITCH: Right.

WEST: They didn't know that.

DAITCH: Yes, it was always possible.

WEST: They didn't know that.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: What did you start say?

DAITCH: I've heard people say that it was routine to use just one or two engines if you're just kind of idling out there.

WEST: Okay, okay. I'm glad you got into that. Yes, that's true. You use the center engine. You use the center engine, and you won't make enough wake.

DAITCH: To be spotted, you mean.

WEST: I didn't know this when the National Geographic, when they interviewed me up there, about the same thing you're talking about. I know what I told them. I didn't know any different then because nobody else did until the story came out. It's in *PT-105*; I've got the book. Kennedy's conversation with the skipper of *105*, that wrote that book. He told him that he was on one engine. Normally you would do that. You'd have the center engine. We had three engines. And you wouldn't make much wake. The wake what would give you away at nighttime.

DAITCH: Right. You can see the phosphorous.

WEST: The wake in the water, the bow and the stern. So just like we fired the torpedo at that destroyer, we did it by the wake. We couldn't see the ship. We saw the wake here, the bow here. I mean the bow here and the stern here, and we fired torpedoes between the bow and stern. So that is what he, the skipper of *105*, who wrote that book on *105* said. He said him and Kennedy had a conversation about that. And he told him that he had one engine. And he said the reason he did was to keep the wake down, which is a normal thing to do. Except, the conditions we were under there with all those destroyers in there and all. I told the people at the National Geographic I figured he had all of his engines running because there might be a possibility he had to move fast. So I told them that. Then I read in the book where he told.... It's nothing wrong with it because we did that a lot of times to keep the wake down.

DAITCH: Yes. But on that particular night....

WEST: You're muffler's on. We had mufflers. You could muffle the engine. You could muffle the engine and put one motor on, in gear. So you're going at slow speed until you could find something you wanted to....

DAITCH: Yes. So it's just unfortunate on that particular occasion, when he really needed to act fast....

WEST: It just happened to be, yes, that way. And the interview I had with him, I remember he used that question quite a bit, he was pushing me on it. And I told him I thought that he had all the engines, the reason being that if he wanted to move fast. But in this case it would have made no difference.

DAITCH: You don't think so?

WEST: No. It would have made no difference if he, the only.... It's being in the wrong place at the wrong time. If he had been moving fast, well, let's change it then. Let's say he had all three motors in. Okay. They might not have touched him. But what I'm trying to say is if you're going along here with one engine at this speed, and this Jap destroyer runs over you, if you'd had all three of them in, you might have been here instead of here.

DAITCH: Right.

WEST: I mean it's one of those things.

DAITCH: Yes, yes.

WEST: But who knows?

DAITCH: Yes, if he had all three engines running, he would have been in that place at that time necessarily.

WEST: I believe if he'd had all three engines in and he was up here, and he'd run over him here; if he'd had one engine in, he'd have been back here. So you can't.... He was doing right as far as camouflaging his boat using one engine. We did it all the time.

DAITCH: Yes. And he would have needed to maybe maneuver to get away from it. And you're also saying that maybe even with three engines on, he might not have been able to scoot out of the way.

WEST: With that destroyer moving at the speed he was, he happened to be at that spot, and that's where he was. And that was it.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: I don't think anybody could be blamed for it. He was doing right in one way it happened to be. But doing that, he happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. It could have been somebody else's boat. It could have been any of the boats out there could all have been run over. We were sitting over in here, somewhere along in here, that destroyer was over in there. It was close to that shore as far as I'm concerned, when you put that line through there. But, you know, we were sitting out here. We were idling in this area, I believe, at one time. We weren't even moving, just laying there. I mean he could have run over us, or he could have run over any of them.

DAITCH: Yes. So you're a sitting duck if you're idling and somebody moves out of the darkness right near you.

WEST: I'm not sure. I can't say for sure we were idling that night. But we probably were running at the lowest speed we could.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: We were trying to stay in that area because we knew they were coming out of there.

DAITCH: Right. Yes.

WEST: That's what it was all about, waiting for them to come out. But I'm not sure if we were idling. We probably weren't idling. We probably had our motors in gear. We were going around in circles or whatever. We knew it was in an area where they were supposed to come by. Like I said, we saw one of them, and we fired two torpedoes at it. But we didn't get no explosion.

DAITCH: And you know there's four coming through, and you only saw one of the four. It's really a large sea.

WEST: That's what I'm telling you.

DAITCH: It's unbelievable.

WEST: It's like looking at a blank wall, a dark wall. That ship was so close to Kolombangara Island that we couldn't see the ship. If he'd been laying there and not making any wake at all, we couldn't have seen him with binoculars.

DAITCH: Wow!

WEST: All of them watched with binoculars to see where they are. And I had good vision. I could see a long ways over the water at nighttime. Anyway, that's why Liebenow had me on a lot of watches on the boat. And in that picture it looks like I'm posing. I'm looking for coconut logs.

DAITCH: Which...?

WEST: That's why a PT boat's lookout was very important because your boat could be broken apart. And if you run over something small in the water, you could rip your prop right off the boat if you're going at high speed. Belonged to this PT boat.... You knew about that.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: And you've been in touch with those people.

DAITCH: I have. That's how I got your name.

WEST: You want to talk about something different?

DAITCH: Actually one of the things I wanted to ask you about was the other crew members of Kennedy's crew, if you knew any of them or ever talked to them.

WEST: Do I ever? I knew Starkey [Ray L. Starkey] but I never talked to him after the rescue.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: Yes. I talked to Smitty [James Smith] not long ago. He was a gunner's mate on PT 159. James Smith. I never talked to Mac[?]. Mac is in Arizona somewhere, and I've never talked to Mac. I talked to Smitty. I think there's four of us left off my boat: Liebenow, myself, Smitty, Mac, and [Inaudible]. Oh, this is a picture that was in the paper. I made some copies of it.

DAITCH: Oh, good. Which one are you here?

WEST: Well, I see him posing.

DAITCH: That's right.

WEST: But what I'm doing, I'm trying to.... See him? Alright, he's on watch this way. I'm on watch this way.

DAITCH: Okay

WEST: And everybody's on watch. But when we were on the way, I was right there most of the time. Liebenow told me that's where he'd like for me to be, up there whenever the boats are underway. But he told the people up in Williamsburg at a bull session that the boat never left the dock unless I was on the deck. I

thought that was pretty good.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: That's about the way it was there. Oh, here, if you want any pictures.

DAITCH: I was going to ask you if there's a chance I could have one of these.

WEST: You can have that one. I'll give you another one.

DAITCH: Thank you.

WEST: I made some copies of them. This picture was made a long time ago. I've had this thing for a long time. There's some of the write-ups in that, a little bit, and Liebenow's name is in there.

DAITCH: Can I have one of these with the....

WEST: Yes, I'll go make another copy of that for you.

DAITCH: That would be nice.

WEST: I'll make a copy of it for you, to give you. I'll run by the.... I can make a copy with my fax machine, but they're not that big.

DAITCH: Oh, okay.

WEST: There's an Office Max right over here. I can make one for you.

DAITCH: We may have to go out together again so I can find my way out.

WEST: No, I'm going to go out with you. So when you go out of here, I'm going to give you an easy way out.

DAITCH: Oh, good. Whew!

WEST: I'm going to take you to 64. You'll get right on it and go.

DAITCH: Oh, that'd be great. Thank you.

WEST: I'll be going the same route we came in. Well, you'll get to an exit that says 64.

DAITCH: Okay. Perfect. That I can do.

WEST: We can go out.... I can run over to the, when we get through here, I can run over to the Office Max and make some copies of it.

DAITCH: Oh, terrific. Did you know any of Kennedy's crew members on his boat, on *109*?

WEST: Yes, I knew Starkey. Starkey was a torpedo man, and he was a member of our squadron. And he went on the base force. We had what you call a base force. The force took care of things that needed to be taken care of as far as the boats are concerned.

DAITCH: Oh, okay, so he wasn't on a boat. The base force just kind of was support.

WEST: On the boat, no. He wasn't. But he went on Kennedy's boat that night, I think. I don't know whether he was on it before or not. But that night.... I knew him. He's actually the only one I knew on that boat. Starkey, he was a torpedo man.

DAITCH: Yes. Did you know if he liked Kennedy?

WEST: Yes. I think the whole crew did, really. The way I understood it, they all liked him. He was a very likable type of person. He mixed in with the crew good, you know. Something like Liebenow.

DAITCH: Yes. Liebenow told me that he ate with you guys in the mess hall, whereas most of the officers would eat separately.

WEST: Oh, yes. He's that type of person. Liebenow was a special person. We couldn't have picked a better one, no way. He just happened to be that way. He's from Virginia, I think Fredricksburg. And he was a special type of person. Everybody on the boat liked him. But when he had the problem.... We'd been on patrol one night, and we'd been in the Kula Gulf and were on our way back the next morning, back to base. And all of a sudden his knee went out. He hasn't forgotten it because I tried to pull it out. I didn't want to mess his leg up.

DAITCH: Oh, really!

WEST: I put my foot.... He leaned back against the forward part on the bow of the boat like, leaning back. And I'm out here. I was pretty strong back then. I put my foot against this thing and took his.... He had to lean like this. I took hold of right here and tried to straighten it.

DAITCH: Yes?

WEST: Yes. That was the last patrol that he made.

DAITCH: No kidding!

WEST: I think it was.

DAITCH: So it was....

WEST: When he got in they took him to the hospital.

DAITCH: Oh, my gosh!

WEST: He came back.... I'm trying to think what month that was, and I'm not sure what it was. But that was a sad day.

DAITCH: I'll bet.

WEST: Sad day that he left because this man right here, he was the exec, and we had a problem with him.

DAITCH: Oh, really.

WEST: He was the opposite to Liebenow.

DAITCH: Yes. Did he become skipper then?

WEST: Yes. But if it hadn't been for Stan Marshall [Stanmore B. Marhall], that you say you're going to interview him?

DAITCH: Yes, I talked to him last week.

WEST: You did?

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: Oh, you've already seen him?

DAITCH: I did.

WEST: Oh, I didn't know that.

DAITCH: He asked me to say "hello" to you.

WEST: Oh, I didn't know that.

DAITCH: Yes, yes. I saw him last week.

WEST: He's quite a guy.

DAITCH: He's very, very nice.

WEST: Oh, he's one of the.... We fell in love with Stan because he come on our boat. And if he hadn't, we would've had a big problem.

DAITCH: Oh, with the exec.

WEST: With this guy, yes. Rough.

DAITCH: Oh, that's.... Yes. Oh, that's too bad. So Stan Marshall took over your....

WEST: What he did, he came in and calmed this thing down. It was getting ready to explode.

DAITCH: Oh, wow!

WEST: Bad. It was. That's why Kelly sent him over there with us on the boat. He knew something was wrong. There was a lot more wrong than he knew about it. And I'm glad he came over there. I'll never forget Stan. He wrote a letter every day. He wrote a letter every day. Liebenow says he's got a mansion down there. Liebenow told me, he said Stan had a mansion down in Carolina, South Carolina.

DAITCH: Oh, it's.... Their place is beautiful. They've got....

WEST: He was in the chicken business.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: He made it big, I think.

DAITCH: Yes, he did very well. He has a lovely family. I met several of his kids, and they're all very nice, warm people.

WEST: I was very fond of him because he's a wonderful person.

DAITCH: Yes, yes. He and his wife are very nice. I mean just a nice family.

WEST: Oh, I didn't know you'd been down there.

DAITCH: Yes, yes. They were very, very, very nice.

WEST: I want to get in touch.... I've got to get in touch with him.

DAITCH: You should. I think he would love hearing from you, I really do.

WEST: Liebenow said he had a little trouble hearing or something?

DAITCH: He does. I'll give you his office number before I leave because I think that phone is easier for him to hear. And he goes there a lot.

WEST: Oh, yes. He's got an office in his home or...?

DAITCH: No, it's a little.... Actually it was their first house when they were first married, and how they use it for an office.

WEST: Yes, Liebenow says he's got a mansion down there.

DAITCH: Oh, yes, it's beautiful. It's beautiful. And they live in an area where it's a lot of family. And I think it was Mozie, his wife's name, I think it was her family that had this land. And a lot of the family members built beautiful homes. They're doing really well.

WEST: He wrote a letter home every day to his son and his relatives. We were real happy he came on there because he was on there at a critical time after Liebenow got his knee hurt. He had to come back to the States here. He went to Guadalcanal and was operated on, and then he went back to the States. And Liebenow went to Europe.

DAITCH: Yes, he told me.

WEST: Well, you know about that. Well, did he say who picked him, didn't he? You know who picked him to go to Europe, don't you?

DAITCH: Now was it Bulkeley or Kelly?

WEST: Admiral Bulkeley.

DAITCH: Yes, yes.

WEST: Admiral Bulkeley's in some of the books. The reason he picked him because he knew what kind of man Liebenow was. That's why he picked him.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: They were going on a secret mission.

DAITCH: Yes, he was telling me. It's very interesting stuff.

WEST: Yes, it was. I told you, well, I probably wouldn't be sitting here if it wasn't for him. Things happen when you're out in a war zone. Skippers, boats do certain things, you know, that, some things that you could get into which would make a difference if you went into it. You could go into it and get killed. But stay out of it, and you wouldn't have accomplished as much as if you'd gone into it. He knew those things, he knew that. We had a PBY for telling us which way to go, telling us where the Jap barges were and all.

DAITCH: What's PBY?

WEST: PBY is a Navy floatplane.

DAITCH: Oh, okay.

WEST: We had radio contact with them at nighttime.

DAITCH: But he had a good instinct for....

WEST: He had an instinct that was very good.

DAITCH: I wish we knew more about Kennedy as a skipper like that. Because unless you talk to his crew members....

WEST: Have you talked to any of these people?

DAITCH: They're all gone, his entire crew is gone. And I haven't, I never got to talk to any of them.

WEST: Well, you could get a lot.... Well, all I've heard pertaining to Kennedy and the crew, I read, most of it I've read, that he was a good skipper, and they enjoyed being with him.

DAITCH: Yes, they seemed to. They certainly had contact after the war, too. I mean he continued to, some of them, he saw them from time to time. Tell me about, before we get too far afield, tell me about the aftermath of when *109* was sunk. And then there's this rumor that.... After the National Geographic people on there, they did a TV program out of all that, they said that there was a memorial service for the crew of the *109*. But I've also heard other places, No, there was no service.

WEST: I don't know about that. I never read anything on that.

DAITCH: Yes. And you don't remember it. You would've been there.

WEST: It seemed like.... I don't know. I don't remember hearing that memorial thing.

DAITCH: Okay.

WEST: If it was, it's been a long time ago. There could have been one time.... I'm just trying to pick my brain. There could have been one time there they were talking about it.

DAITCH: Talking about...?

WEST: Do you think it ever happened?

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: Do you think you heard it happened?

DAITCH: I heard it happened. But I've never seen it confirmed for sure.

WEST: I don't think.... You probably won't either.

DAITCH: No. Maybe it didn't. Well, would you usually, if somebody, if a boat was lost or something happened, would you usually have a memorial?

WEST: Uh no.

DAITCH: No.

WEST: No, no, not that I know of. We had an incident that happened with Squadron 10 boats coming back from patrol. We never.... If you're on one boat and something like this, mostly you only know what's going on on your boat, I mean your patrols and so forth. Each one. And the only ones that got into the meetings would be the officers, the officers' meetings; they had them every so often or whatever. It seems to me we maybe had a memorial that morning. Yes, it was the morning we got back off patrol. I never heard of that.

DAITCH: Yes, okay. I was just curious. Because I've heard, you know, both ways. And now once it's on TV or in a book somewhere, people believe it.

WEST: Well, that happens. They do all kinds of stuff, you hear all kinds of things.

DAITCH: Well, tell me then like after, whether there was a memorial service or not, I'm sure it's always shocking when something like that happens. I know it happens all the time in war. But was there any scuttlebutt about what happened?

WEST: No. I was just sitting here thinking that I might have heard something about one. But I'm not sure. I'm not sure, being you brought it up now. I'm trying to think back. And it's possible there could have been some talk about it.

DAITCH: Yes. People, I mean do you remember people saying.... The commanding officers makes the decision not to go back into Blackett Strait and patrol that same area again.

WEST: Yes, Warfield.

DAITCH: Warfield made that decision. But do you remember anybody saying, Well, shouldn't we go back in there and see if anybody from *109* is out there?

WEST: I don't know what happened the next day, that he got sunk, if someone did or not. Has anybody told you that?

DAITCH: I think I heard that someone went out maybe, well, it would have been....

WEST: I would think that one of the boats would've, that they would have sent one of the boats out to this, but they didn't. No, that's not right. They didn't. If they had, they would've picked them up.

DAITCH: They should have, yes.

WEST: Well, yes. They were there for.... If they'd gone back the next day they would've. See, we didn't go up there in daytime.

DAITCH: Right. And that next afternoon is when they were on the island.

WEST: Yes. You see the only time we went was nighttime. We didn't go in that area because they had big guns sitting up on the shore that would blow you out of the water.

DAITCH: Yes, yes. And Kennedy knew that.

WEST: They had 10,000 troops on that island, Kolombangara Island. It's an island if you went all the way around it, it'd be the same. You started off and looked at it and went all the way around to the other side, it looked the same.

DAITCH: Really?

WEST: How are you using these two tapes? How do you use two of them?

DAITCH: They're just, it's just a duplicate. And I do that because....

WEST: You use them together.

DAITCH: Yeah. I do it because....

WEST: Oh, this tape is separate. Okay, you're getting two different....

[END SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

[BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2]

DAITCH: Anyway, getting back to.... Did you have something you wanted to say before?

WEST: You can put this on the tape. The night that I told you we got shot up, and one of our engines got shot up.

DAITCH: Yes, between the two destroyers.

WEST: We torpedoed one of the destroyers after we got out from between them.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: And all that stuff. So we got all the people out of the engine room. I'm going back to this to tell you a little story.

DAITCH: Sure.

WEST: Got all the people out of the engine room because we thought we were going to blow up because we could smell gas coming out of that engine room. This is high-octane gas. So we're looking to get blown up, and we're getting shot up. So Dan Jamieson [Daniel Jamieson?], he was our chief motor mech. He was, as far as I'm concerned, the best one in the whole squadron. We never missed one patrol in 18 months.

DAITCH: Wow!

WEST: Not one. That man had a lot to do with it. We had three motor mechs. He was chief motor mech. He had a lot of experience before he came in the Navy. But he came out. I didn't even see it, but another guy saw it. He was looking outside and saw the bullets coming down, off the crow's nest of the Japanese destroyer. And he said, Dan Janieson said, "Look!" After we'd gotten through these things, all of these bullets. We got through it. And we'd go off over here somewhere and try to find one of these Jap destroyers to shoot, fire torpedoes at. And he said, "Well, I came out to see action. I've

seen it. And now I'm ready to go home." [Laughter] And we'd just gotten there.

DAITCH: I'll bet.

WEST: We had another over a year to go there.

DAITCH: Oh, my gosh! That must have been one of the worst experiences.

WEST: Aaww, yes. Well, see, we were on patrol at nighttime. We were under threat of floatplanes all night. They come over you, especially when you're going to station. We had a station to go, say, about 50 miles away from, 40 or 50 miles away, from Rendova. Certain place you had to go up and patrol for these barges, Jap barges, looking for them. And each boat had their own station. While you're going up, you've got rough water, and the boat is jumping all over the place, and you've got these floatplanes dropping flares on you. He drops a flare on you, and then he'll fly over here and try and he can't see you. He doesn't know where you're at. Sometimes we almost stopped the boat to keep him from seeing our wake. But to give you an idea of something, they dropped a flare one night. They dropped a flare so we didn't want to move the boat so he could find where we were. And the flare came right on top of the boat.

DAITCH: Oh, my gosh!

WEST: Then you move and get out of the way of the flare.

DAITCH: Yes!

WEST: But the maneuvers they had were to drop the flares, and they did it almost every night. And they'd go over here and turn and see that the flare'd come down so you could see it, so they could drop a bomb on you.

DAITCH: Right. Yes.

WEST: They had personnel bombs in their planes. It only took one, they were only about that big around and about that long. But one of them, it only took one to blow up a PT boat.

DAITCH: Oh, yes.

WEST: We had tanks' capacity of 3,000 gallons of gas. Only one of those bombs was all it would take. I told you about that one plane that they dropped all the heads on. I was putting a smoke screen while he was dropping the bombs.

DAITCH: Yes, yes.

WEST: He had a lot of bombs. He dropped them all.

DAITCH: Oh, my gosh. Did you lose many boats? I mean did you see boats get blown up, or was your squadron pretty lucky? What happened?

WEST: No, no. We didn't have much of that trouble. We had little problems. One boat ran aground, and we never did get.... We had to get everything off it because they had a gun, the Japanese had a gun sitting on the shore, and we couldn't get it. The boat, we finally sunk it, got rid of it. Man, you ran to get the papers. Kelly was one. He went in a rowboat to get the papers, and he almost got blown up while he was trying to get the papers, the secret papers, off the boat.

DAITCH: Yes. Wow, my goodness.

WEST: In that New Georgia Group of islands. But we had a lot of experiences on patrols and things at nighttime. The one Kennedy was in. And there was the one we had at Rendova. Most of the rest of them were barge traffic, shooting barges. We had on the bow of the boat, this here shows it there, there's a 37mm on the bow of this boat up here. That was the gun I fired when there was general quarters for barges. Because the torpedoes, you stood by the torpedo tubes in case the electric circuits didn't work. And you had a plunge onto it and 2200's black powder would shoot the torpedoes out. But in case they didn't work, sometimes they didn't, the electrical circuits sometimes would get corroded or whatever. But just in case you would stand by there. But doing barge traffic, I was up on the bow, and I had someone loading the gun for me. And I was firing the gun up there, the 37mm. It's about that big around, the barrel.

But this one night, it was in Kula Gulf; when I say Kula Gulf, that's a big place. They had a big Japanese battle there one night, our ships and the Japanese ships. We sunk.... We lost I think a cruiser and a destroyer there, right in that place. And they lost two or three ships. We saw the flashes from the guns from their harbor; we weren't allowed to go out that night because they knew this battle was going to come up in the Kula Gulf. So they had a big battle there in the Kula Gulf there, in that area. Was something I was gonna say about it. Oh, we had.... We went up there one night, and Kelly was onboard this night. He was the CO of the squadron. And we saw these Jap barges, and went in and attacked the barges. And there were two of us boats. And we were going in at high speed. You make the runs, and you go by them. You'd fire all the guns at them. But they had more guns than we did.

DAITCH: Oh!

WEST: They had one barge they'd loaded it up with guns. They put sandbags all around them and took a big barge, and they had.... This night it was like a miracle. There were so many bullets. I could see so many bullets around me they were like raindrops.

DAITCH: Oh, my gosh.

WEST: That's how thick they were. But when you make up a belt of bullets, you've got, that's a tracer. And these four you can't see. There were four in between the tracer bullets.

DAITCH: Oh, yes.

WEST: Anyway, we got them; we got shot up pretty bad making these runs, you know, on them. And we shot them up and sunk one of the big ones.

DAITCH: Oh, you did.

WEST: And then Sam [Sam Corey], our radioman, was loading my gun. And all of a sudden.... I kept telling him, "Hit the deck!" We had this 37mm that only would go from here to here and from here to here. Well, when you turned, made it around to come back for another run, you hit the deck because the best target for the boat is coming over on top of your head.

DAITCH: Yes, right.

WEST: So this one time I kept telling him, "Sam, hit the deck! Hit the deck!" I'm hollering at him, screaming at him. And he was getting.... I don't know why he didn't do it. He sat there, and all these bullets there, you could see them coming. And all of a sudden he howled at me, "Oh, my God!" Bullet went right through him as he sat there. He was ripped. He was loading my gun here, and I was over here. I'm sitting, and he was over there, firing the gun. He died about two o'clock in the morning on the deck of *PT 157*.

DAITCH: Oh, my God.

WEST: They made another run with him laying on the deck.

DAITCH: Really.

WEST: Yes. Kelly made the statement, "Let's make another run for Sam." He's laying up there on the deck. We went on in, and he died about two o'clock. He was a swell guy. I liked Sam.

DAITCH: So would that be more typical in terms of casualties than losing a whole boat, that once in a while somebody on a boat would maybe get shot?

WEST: Say that again?

DAITCH: It would be more normal, in terms of casualties, that usually you wouldn't lose a whole boat but just somebody on a boat might get shot?

WEST: Yes. We had one boat had two or three guys get shot up there.

DAITCH: Aw, gee....

WEST: Yes. A shell hit a torpedo and blew the torpedo up. And I think it was three got killed on it. I've got a picture somewhere shows Todd City. It shows the people in Squadron 9 who got killed, while we were operating from Treasury Islands. We operated from this island because the trees, we could go underneath the trees to keep the Japanese planes from seeing us in the daytime. Because you get underneath these trees you couldn't see the boats; we could keep them tied up in there. And also they didn't know where you were or whatever. At nighttime you'd go out and come back in the morning and you'd go back underneath these trees.

DAITCH: Yes, that was smart.

WEST: Tie up underneath the trees.

DAITCH: You were going to tell me a little bit more about just being on the boats. You were telling me before, when I didn't have the tape machine running, about how they really beat you to death.

WEST: Yes, they would. They beat me so much that I started having pains in my stomach. They'd give me shots, pills. And that's when I finally had to come back to the States. But I'd been on it a year and a half.

DAITCH: Oh, my gosh.

WEST: They're supposed to take you off after six months, your body is supposed to be beaten so much. It's hard to believe how much you go through when you're riding on the boats. If you're traveling at a certain speed, or the seas are a certain way, it just almost knocks your teeth out. We were in some pretty rough water with them.

DAITCH: Yes. Well, I think about that because Kennedy was never all that healthy anyway. I mean he had a back problem to begin with. And I wonder how he tolerated that.

WEST: I don't know. He probably was suffering. I would say that he was suffering on those boats. That's right, he volunteered to go, though, in the boat. Yes, it's quite amazing. I mean I think back on the conditions he was in, and people didn't know, didn't know the condition he was in. And that's something.

DAITCH: Yes. Well, and it wasn't easy duty for anybody. I mean you guys were all, I had read or heard somewhere or somebody told me that there was not much to eat. By the time you got up to Rendova, you didn't have....

WEST: Oh, that. [Laughter] Yes. No, we didn't have much to eat. We had to go steal the food off the Army. Kelly, the CO, told us we're going to be up, we was at Tulaghi getting ready to go on the invasion of Rendova. And the night before we left, he said, I forget how it came out, but he came out and said, "Each person on watch, you change watch all during the night, go up to this warehouse. And if I brought back a case of bacon." See, we had cases of bacon and cases of juice and cases of all kinds. "Well, you tell the other fellows I brought back a case of bacon. I brought back a case of grapefruit juice." So when we left the boat and waited down by the bow. He said, "You're not going to get no food for two weeks. And what you don't get, it's going to be up to you how you get it. Get it any way you can get it."

DAITCH: Kelly said that or your other commanding officers? Or Liebenow said that?

WEST: It was passed down from Kelly.

DAITCH: Somebody did that.

WEST: But we did. Neither boat knew, you didn't know what the other one had done. See, PT boats are a bunch of orphans. They did whatever they had to do. So we did that. And then when we got up there, we didn't have no galley set up nowhere on the shore that we could go to get food. But on our boats we had a stove to cook because we had to have something to cook on. So we got all we could get on that, and then we had 12 people on the boat to provide food for. So when we got up there to Rendova, and we started to get water--we got water off LSTs. They had huge water supplies, and they were coming in, LSTs were coming in and supplying, getting ready to invade New Georgia Island I was telling you about where the guns had been shooting from. We got water off of LST's. So they were loaded with food, all over the decks, because they were taking the food with them where they were taking soldiers to invade New Georgia, the group of islands. And what we did, we picked up all the food we could get off the decks while we were getting water.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: We were getting water for the boats, and the guys were picking up.... And they had to wait in line, throwing stuff, cases of stuff, off the LSTs. Okay?

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: Somebody else probably told you that, too.

DAITCH: No. I think that's the first time I've heard of that. That's pretty neat.

WEST: Well, that's what we did. And I'll never forget Reynolds[?], our cook. He was tall and slim. And there was a captain over there. Now he's about six foot four; he was a very big guy. And Red had a case of orange juice heading

towards the boat. The captain came up behind him and picked him up, I think by the back of the neck; wanted to know what the hell are you doing with all those cases of orange juice. [Laughter] So he broke that up. So what we did, though, we did that. And all the boats were supposed to do this, see. We all knew it. And we then would split the food up with one another. That's how we lived for about two or three weeks before we could get the galley up to get some food out. That's the way we did it.

DAITCH: Boy! So it was not like you were receiving a lot of support. That every...

WEST: No, we didn't. We didn't have much support in the beginning.

DAITCH: Every couple of days the supply ship comes along and gives you what you need.

WEST: No, no. They supplied us with water. But the food, you had to steal that. That's what I call it.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: You picked it up. They had cases laying all over the deck they were taking on invasion for the soldiers. So we were taking it off the deck, down below. And we had guys--we were throwing cases down and stuff below decks. Anything we got we'd split up with the other boats.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: That's what we did. In our squadron. But, see, we had Squadron 5 come in there, same place. Now Kennedy, I'm not sure which squadron he was attached to, 5 or 10. We had three squadrons there, 5, 10, and 9.

DAITCH: I can't remember exactly how this worked. But wasn't he kind of left, him and another boat or two were kind of left over out of their squadron?

WEST: Yes, they were. They were, yes. They were. Now I could tell you a story about a.... You were just talking about some of the people being killed off a boat. There were more from.... I don't remember too much about that. This one boat, Squadron 10, was coming back. Two of them had been on patrol the night before. And one boat broke down, engines broke down, and another boat was towing them. And they were coming back, and they were in an area they weren't supposed to be in. And the B-25's were coming back from Rabaul on bombing; B-25's, they had a lot of machineguns on them. And they saw the PT boats down there, and they started firing on them.

DAITCH: Oh, no!

WEST: And they.... I'm just trying to think if they sunk one of them. I think they sunk one of the PT Squadron 10 boats. One guy, he went down and got the American flag, and was waving at the people in the B-25's. And they cut his arm right off from the machinegun bullets.

DAITCH: You're kidding!

WEST: Normally on a boat you have to get orders to fire from the skipper. Under certain conditions you don't do that, if you're in certain conditions. Like the night I'll tell you that Smitty fired on this plane. He did. He just, like that, he did. We were going to go get sunk, and he.... But a 20mm opened up on that plane and he might have saved us. The other thing was a guy jumped on the 20mm gun, and he shot the motor right out of the B-25.

DAITCH: Really!

WEST: Yes.

DAITCH: Oh, my gosh!

WEST: So that's what saved some more lives there. He shot the motor out of the plane.

DAITCH: Did the crew, the plane crew, survive?

WEST: Yes, they did survive. But they thought they were shooting at Japanese.

DAITCH: Sure they did.

WEST: So they had a big to-do at Guadalcanal after that, a big identification thing, so they could identify PT boats.

DAITCH: That was a good idea.

WEST: Too late then after the people got killed.

DAITCH: Oh, yes.

WEST: They took a beating.

DAITCH: Oh, boy.

WEST: In that boat. Like I said, Liebenow, the skipper of the boat, he did a lot of things that helped the crew out, to keep us from getting sunk.

DAITCH: Yes, yes, smart man.

WEST: He was. He was the best skipper in the squadron.

DAITCH: Um, let's just turn these off for a second and see.... [Pause] Let's first talk about....

WEST: I'm just trying to think. I've got a tape somewhere on that. They gave me a tape on part of it, National Geographic did. I can tell you what I did. I can tell you exactly what I did.

DAITCH: Okay.

WEST: National Geographic called me and asked me if I would come up to Washington to help identify the *PT-109*. And I told them I would. They said, "We'll get back with you later." So they got back in touch with me, and told me, they sent me plane reservations and motel reservations. They made it all. I didn't have to do nothing. They sent me up there. I spent the night up there, and I went to the.... They met me at the motel the next morning, a couple of their people. I don't know their names right now. And we went over to the National Geographic where they're having, where they make their movies. They have their films set up at.... And they had the actual photographs of the camera 1200 feet below water where they'd found what they thought to be *PT-109*. And they wanted me to help identify the torpedo tube because that was the only part that was visible because sand had covered the rest of the boat up, the wooden part.

So I identified, with two people from the Naval Archives were there, I identified the torpedo tube as being the one identical to the one that was on that boat. And that's what they wanted to hear. The more people identified it the better. And the two people from the Naval Archives said the same thing. So I spent about three and a half hours viewing this film that they'd taken until as far as I was concerned that was it. So that was about the trip. Then they made a tape of it, a tape up there for about an hour, the tape. I taped practically my whole life of it. They sent part of it to me. I've got it somewhere in there; right now I'm not sure where, but I've got it upstairs.

DAITCH: So what did you...? When you're looking at that video.... I've seen some video of that, of the torpedo tube. It's got I don't know what they were, barnacles or other kinds of stuff. How did you.... I mean how do you get past all that to see what's really...?

WEST: Well, what they were looking for was the actual, the part of the tube that cranked the tube out. That was the main part. And the people from Naval Archives said the same thing. But that type of crank to crank that tube out was it. It had to be it. And there was metal, it was all metal, and it showed up good. And it showed up good in the picture. So we went past the rest of it and just looked at it. And said, well, this is what cranked this torpedo, see. When you got underway at nighttime, the first thing you did you cranked your torpedo tubes out. And you put them out in position. If

you're going out, if you think you might be going out to a larger ship to torpedo. If you're not going out to anything but small ships, you don't do it.

DAITCH: So normally they kind of sit on the deck of the boat.

WEST: They sit, and then you crank them out like this.

DAITCH: Okay.

WEST: They're sitting at this angle, like that.

DAITCH: Yes. Sort of diagonal off the deck.

WEST: See the torpedoes are sitting there on the deck. Now they're sitting there, you can't see it. Huh! Well, anyway.... But you crank them out.

DAITCH: Yes, right there on the banner; it's on the deck here.

WEST: Yes. Okay. They're sitting there. There's a crank right, this is what we identified, right there.

DAITCH: Mmmm hmmm. This is the front?

WEST: That crank, when you pull it, you've got a crank on it, you put it on inside, and you crank that torpedo, move that torpedo, and that tube ends up over here, sitting way over here, to shoot that torpedo out like this.

DAITCH: Right. So it's not going across the deck of the boat. It's just sitting outward.

WEST: Right, right. So that's what we used. That part had to be the type that was on the torpedo tubes.

DAITCH: Yes. Now is that unique to PT boats, those cranks?

WEST: This was, yes, unique for these. But they were all alike. I mean not all of them, but the squadron, the boats out there were. The boats in the South Pacific were all, I guess, at that time.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: Except for.... I mean as far as ELCO [Electric Boat Company] boats; this is an ELCO boat, and that had that type of tube on it.

DAITCH: Yes. So that had to be the *109*.

WEST: Yes, yes.

DAITCH: That's interesting. Well, tell me about, we did not get around to actually talking about your biggest interaction with Kennedy, which was picking up him and his crew. How did *157* get involved?

WEST: Well, like I said, we're all talking, the crew was all, we thought they had all drowned and the boat was laying on the bottom. Until this evening, late in the evening, this war canoe came up, and it had these natives in it. I'm not sure whether the shore watcher or not--we called them shore watchers; they're intelligence people--were with them or not. I'm not sure of that. But this man down where it is in the book. His picture's in here. I don't think he was, I'm not sure if he was with the men or not. But anyway, they delivered.... The first time I saw it was when we came on board, he had this coconut shell, and we were all standing around in the cockpit of the boat looking at this shell and this piece of paper which Kennedy wrote on. President Kennedy carved on that shell what we needed. He told us where they were, how many people were alive, and how many of them were dead. And he told us where to come. And we could have used the coconut shell without the paper. But then when he got with these people, and then he got a piece of paper, then he wrote some other, which is right here.

DAITCH: Okay.

WEST: There's the shell right there. Then we read the whole thing. Then the officers in the groups in charge of the operations at Rendova went ashore and had a meeting. They came back, and they picked our boat, *157*, and I think it was two other boats went with us. But our boat is the one that went ashore. I used a lead line and directed the skipper in between the reefs, we had to go within a few feet of the reefs, and then you could run the boat aground. So you had to.... I used a lead line to keep getting our--a lead line is something you measure depths with.

DAITCH: Oh, okay.

WEST: It tells you how deep the water is. It's marked, and you had markings on it you could feel. So at night you can't see it, you've got to feel them. And they're so many fathoms for each mark. And I used the lead line, and he was going very slowly to keep us off the reefs because some of them were on top of the water almost. So we went in almost to the shore, pretty close to the shore. And then I got in one of the little boats with two other people; I think Mac was one of them, Mac was one of them, and I'm not sure who the other person was. But we went in to shore and then made a signal. And they came out. We kept loading them on the boat, on the little dinghy, the rowboat, the dinghy we had that we took up there for this purpose. And it's a boat we used to use for other things. We used to take shore watchers ashore with in, intelligence reports, nighttime. But just a little boat. We kept bringing them out 'til we got them all aboard. And Kennedy, he was there. He had come aboard. He went in and helped get them out, helped get them on the boat, get them in the boats.

DAITCH: Now you had picked up Kennedy at the shore watcher's location and then gone over to pick up the crew? Does that sound right?

WEST: Yes. Well, yes. I got ahead of myself a little bit. We went over and got the people from where the intelligence people were on that island there.

DAITCH: Right. Because the natives had taken him over there?

WEST: Yes.

DAITCH: Okay.

WEST: The natives had taken him over there. Well, the first thing was, though, I got ahead of myself a little. Kennedy what he did, they had a signal he told them that they'd use. And he fired either one or two shots from a rifle, I remember that very well, to let them know what was going on. And then after that we went in and picked them up in the boats.

DAITCH: Yes. What was the crew like? They must have been pitiful.

WEST: They were very happy people.

DAITCH: I'll bet.

WEST: Yes, they were very happy people. And some of them were burnt pretty bad, and they were very sore, and hadn't had anything to eat other than coconuts all the time they were on the.... They were in pretty bad shape. But some of them were.... Most of them could walk pretty good; we helped them, helped them on, got them in the boats. And we got them onboard, and Kennedy and the crew were down below. We had some food for them, and we had some medication. We had a pharmacist's mate onboard taking care of the wounds on some of them. And we'd brought some extra food along for them to eat, have something to eat. And had plenty of coffee for them to drink. And we got out of there, got out from under those reefs, got back out in the deep water. And we went back to Rendova with them onboard. Then that night they went ashore and stayed on the base that night. The next morning we took them, the crew, Kennedy and his crew, down to Tulaghi. That's where we took the pictures that were down in the boat I was telling you about.

DAITCH: Yes. We'll have to nose around some more and see if we can find that. That would be wonderful.

WEST: There's that. Yes, I'd like to find that picture. Liebenow got one, too. That was about the way we did it.

DAITCH: What do you remember about the trip back? You probably weren't hanging around with them because you had duties to perform. But did you, you know, get to talk to them or overhear anything they were talking about.

WEST: No, not really. Because most of the time I was on the deck of the boat. And when the boat was underway most all the time I was on deck. That was my rating, torpedo's and gun's mates. That's the deck rating. And your time is up on deck. And I didn't really.... They were all down below. And I didn't even get to talk to them. The main thing we were interested in [was] to get them in that boat and get them to Rendova. I never even.... They weren't talking about it. They just wanted to get on the boat. When they got down below, they all got together. Other people were down there with them, but what they said about it, I didn't.... I was above deck most of the time.

DAITCH: Did you talk to them later? I heard that Kennedy took some ribbing about letting his ship get rammed by a destroyer.

WEST: Oh, he got.... I think he got some. Yes, I think he got some ribbing, but you know it's.... Most of them.... Not to him because it could've happened to any boat up there. You had 14 boats, and any one of them could've gotten rammed. It just happened that his was the boat that got rammed. Nobody could blame him for it because it's like any other boat. If you're in the line of one of them destroyers, dark as it was, there's no way you could see him. The only way you can see something at nighttime on the water is you use a moon track, what we call a moon track.. It's when you look across the water and see the light part. Then like when I saw the Japanese destroyer coming in, I told you, from out in the ocean at the Rendova battle, you're just looking. The ocean's light back there. But this night it was so.... It was the darkest night I've ever seen in my life. It was just like.... I've been on the water a lot, and I've never seen anything like it. You couldn't see nothing. And that was the problem. If that had been a moonshine night, it would've been a different situation altogether.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: A lot of difference. There would've been a lot of things done different and would've had a lot.... We would've had a lot more people dead and a lot more boats would've been involved and everything else. But nobody could see nothing. The Japanese picked the night. That's why they picked it. They knew what it was going to be. They knew there were PT boats at Rendova. And they knew how dark it was going to be. And we didn't have any radar. That's before we got the radar.

DAITCH: Right. Yes. So it's an advantage or a disadvantage, depending on how you look at it. It's an advantage because they can't see you. But it's a disadvantage because you can't see them.

WEST: That's right. Exactly. Exactly.

DAITCH: That must have been so nerve-wracking, you know, being out there in the complete dark. You can't really communicate with each other because you're not supposed to use radios.

WEST: No, right. Right. One of the boats broke in and said something to somebody, but I forget what it was. It's in one of these stories I read. I forget what it was they said. I don't know it was. But you weren't supposed to unless it was a dire emergency that you have to do it.

DAITCH: Yes, yes.

WEST: It's a night I'll never forget, never, never. No.

DAITCH: So tell me, when you picked them up, you were busy when you were on the boat moving. Did you get to talk to any of them at Rendova or Tulaghi, Kennedy or his crew?

WEST: No. I didn't talk to anyone. I don't remember any conversation. I'm sure I had some. But I can't remember anything.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: These people were so interested in getting help. They were beat-up people.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: And not much conversation goes on.

DAITCH: Yes, probably not.

WEST: Some conversation went on between Kennedy and his crew down below and stuff like that. But I wasn't down there, so there's no way I could've known. Some of the other people, I'm sure, might have been in on it. Most of them are not around anymore.

DAITCH: Yes. Right. It's just such an amazing thing. I think Liebenow, he kind of laughed when talking about using the term "rescue." Like he said, "We just picked them up. It's not like we found them."

WEST: That's right. That's right. I've got a tape. I've got a tape I was going to use here at Norfolk. I don't know how it happened. Bill Shannon [William Shannon?] had.... I know what it was. The last PT boat that was in existence was in Norfolk. It's a 120-foot aluminum boat. And they were using it out there for pulling targets for something to shoot at because it's fast. That one had eight diesel engines in it.

DAITCH: Wow.

WEST: But anyway, that was the last one. And they wanted something that week to put on the news pertaining to PT boats. So Bill got in touch, Bill Shannon.... Somebody got in touch with him, and he asked me to go over there with him. So I met him over at [Inaudible] in Norfolk. And I've got a tape, they give you a tape with it with the.... So with these people, they don't want you to beat around the bush. They want you to say in the least words and....

DAITCH: Right, for news.

WEST: Cut to the bottom line. I was starting to say something, and he said, "Well, how did you get them out?" I said, "Well, we left Rendova, and we went up to the island." I don't know the name of the island right now. It's in his book. And I said, "We picked them up, and we brought them back to Rendova. And that's it." And I knew what he was doing; it kind of got to me a little bit. I said, Well, I'll give it to you short and sweet.

DAITCH: [Laughter] Right. Exactly.

WEST: I've got the tape of it.

DAITCH: Yes, if you don't want to hear the whole story, I'll give you as little as possible.

WEST: Yes. Anyway, he just sent me a tape of it, a very short tape. Well, it's pretty good, though. It started off with PT boats underway and different things, you know. And then you come down to our conversation.

DAITCH: Oh, yes. Did they use old footage of the PT boats from the war?

WEST: Yes.

DAITCH: Did they use old footage of the PT boats underway?

WEST: Yes. They used it, yes.

DAITCH: That's neat. Well, I don't....

WEST: I can make you a copy of that if you want.

DAITCH: Yes. I'm sure we've got footage. Although I should ask....

WEST: I don't know if you've got that or not unless you got it from [Inaudible] Norfolk, [Inaudible].

DAITCH: Oh, that'd be fun to have.

WEST: See, it was on the news. I don't know what you want.

DAITCH: You know all these little things having to do with Kennedy are valuable for the Library. Because anybody who comes with a certain question about a certain thing, you'd like to be able to direct them to it.

WEST: I would say you got a lot of information from Liebenow and Stan.

DAITCH: Yes. Although...

WEST: I call him Liebenow. His name is Bud.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: Well, they called him Bud. His name was William.

DAITCH: Yes, yes. But, you know, everybody has their own experiences, and it's good to hear from different people.

WEST: Yes, it is.

DAITCH: So did you ever, after that, have any conversations with...? I mean Kennedy stayed. But I don't know if he stayed in your squadron.

WEST: What was that?

DAITCH: Kennedy stayed after the *109* was sunk.

WEST: Yes, he did.

DAITCH: He got another boat.

WEST: Yes, he stayed, but I didn't run into him. Like I say, our boat crews, most of them stay on the boats. And we very seldom went ashore. It wasn't, you know, one of those things; you didn't get to talk to other people a lot, just the ones on your boat. And the officers had their meetings, and they had to get together more than anybody else.

DAITCH: Yes. That was pretty hard duty, wasn't it? Because I asked Liebenow, you know, I thought, well, the officers maybe hung around. And when you're not working that maybe they played cards or did this or that or the other. And he didn't seem to indicate that there was a lot of, you know....

WEST: You didn't have time. Well, you see, your body's under such strain all the time from patrols at nighttime. In the daytime you've got something. The crew, I mean, you've got, if you fired the guns, you've got to clean your guns. Or fired torpedo tubes, you've got to clean the tubes out. You've got to put all the torpedoes in the tubes. The engines, you had to be working on the engines, checking the engines all the time, and different things. On a boat there are so many things to do that.... The only time we had off was nighttime if we didn't have to go on patrol. Yes. Then we used to play poker all night.

DAITCH: Oh, really!

WEST: All night long. Two-bit poker.

DAITCH: The officers played with you?

WEST: No. The vents in the boat, you had to keep them all closed up because no light could get out.

DAITCH: Oh, right.

WEST: And you've got a towel wrapped around your neck wiping the perspiration off. We used to play poker 'til two, three o'clock in the morning.

[END SIDE 1, TAPE 2]

[BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 2]

WEST: But sometimes you had to go in place of somebody else that couldn't go. You had to go in their place.

DAITCH: Oh, really! On another, on a different.... As an individuals you'd have to go on another boat, or your boat would have to go?

WEST: No, no. You'd stay on your boat.

DAITCH: Oh, okay.

WEST: Let's say boat 165 couldn't go on patrol: Somebody's boat would go in his place. Sometimes you had assignments like you had so many different spots maybe we need to go. Well, the intelligence says there's a bunch of Jap barges going to be carrying troops over here tonight, this night. Sometimes so many boats had to go for that. Then maybe that meant you had to go two nights in a row. It makes it rough, I'll tell

you, when you did it.

DAITCH: Oh, yes.

WEST: Because it takes you a day to recuperate because you're up all night long.

DAITCH: Right.

WEST: You're not.... You're supposed to have a three.... We had three off and three on. But if you had any kind of battle quarters during the night, you were up most of the night. I'll never forget what happened one night. It was in the Kula Gulf. And Liebenow, he would pull a fast one, he was going to shoot it. There was supposed to be a Japanese up on a hill had a 6 inch naval gun up there. So I was asleep. You slept with a helmet on and your lifejacket, and you had a .45 and a machete. A special machete about that long. And three clips of ammunition. And it was tracers so if you were knocked overboard, you could shoot it, and they'd pick you up. But the whole time you were in a helmet, lifejacket, and .45. That was the uniform 'til we left at dark until you came back. Because some of the guys, their boats got blown up, and they lost a whole crew because someone was sleeping down below. You slept on top, on deck. If it rained, that'd make no difference. You still, you got to go there and sleep, you'd put something over the top of your head and try to get some sleep.

DAITCH: Yes. But at least you'd be alive.

WEST: This one night I'll never forget. I was kicking in the bed for years afterwards. During the nighttime, Liebenow decided we could use our 37mm on the bow to fire at this Japanese 6 inch gun up on the hill somewhere. He was up there somewhere. But you didn't want to let him know where you were. Anyway, the reason I'm saying this is at the time he pulled the trigger on the 37mm to fire it, a guy grabbed me and said, "General quarters!" And when he did, I almost jumped over the top of the torpedo tubes and over the side of the boat. [Laughter] I thought we got hit.

DAITCH: [Laughter] Yes, because you heard the gunfire at the same time.

WEST: Yes, same instant. I'll never forget that.

DAITCH: Yes, that's scary.

WEST: He was just, you know, just messing around with that gun, just shooting at.... We knew the gun was up there somewhere. So we were letting them know we knew they had a gun up there.

DAITCH: Yes. Right.

WEST: They shot a couple of rounds up there.

DAITCH: Wow.

WEST: But I almost jumped out of my skin.

DAITCH: I would just imagine there were lots of episodes like that, across all the boats, that there were lots of times when you just jumped out of your skin because it's so nerve-wracking.

WEST: Yes, it is. Your nerves are tense most of the night. I mean you're bound to get a little.... We had it set up like three on and three off, but it didn't mean nothing. If you could do it.

DAITCH: Yes. Right.

WEST: That's the way we worked it.

DAITCH: Who would, like does the skipper get three on and three off, or hardly ever does the skipper get that?

WEST: Yes, he got it. Yes, he took it. Yes. As long as the patrol was going normally. I mean, you know, he would. It all depends. It all depends on what went on. Most of the time it would work out that he'd get it. But a lot of times it didn't.

DAITCH: Yes, right. I can imagine even just, you know, you're trying to rest but there's noise and you hear shots fired in the distance. Or it's just a bumpy night, and the water's rough.

WEST: Most of our patrols at nighttime, the mufflers were closed. It'd stop some of the noise from outside. I can tell you an incident if you want to know of another incident.

DAITCH: Sure.

WEST: I put a lot of time at the wheel of the boat because I had been on boats a lot before, and Liebenow used to put me at the wheel of the boat. He's here. I'm here, and he's here. Lots of action on the boat went that way, too. And this time we were in the Kula Gulf. We were up on one side of the island in the Kula Gulf there. And we were looking for Jap barges, and we were close to the island. We used to get so close to the island, you could smell the fish, the Japanese were cooking fish, if the wind was blowing the right way.

DAITCH: Wow. Now which island was Kula Gulf?

WEST: Kula Gulf was Kolombangara Island.

DAITCH: Kolombangara, okay.

WEST: Kolombangara was sitting on Kula Gulf. Some of it, not all of it; but part of it was. There was this one night we were up there, and we saw a destroyer coming way off. So we backed into the island. We backed the boat into the island as close as we could get because we didn't want that destroyer to see us. If we were laid in, he'd go by. We didn't know if it was a Jap destroyer or if it was one of ours. We weren't sure. Because, you know, nobody told us that one of ours was going to be in the area.

DAITCH: Right.

WEST: But he's coming around, and we're backing in and backing in. And all of a sudden one of our boats, there were three boats, I think, with one over this way, one over this way, and we're in. We were lined up there backed into this island. And all of a sudden one of the skippers on one of these boats, he lost his nerve or he lost something. I don't know what it was. But he really almost got us sunk. He fired two torpedoes at that destroyer. And when he did, the flash from the tubes--see, you've got no oil in it--flash from the tubes, and that destroyer started flying back. Oh, my God! I'll never forget that night. And so then we had to get out of there, try to get out of there without getting shot and killed or sunk. And by that time, when we were backed in, and then he fired two torpedoes at the destroyer. And then took off. The shells were coming over the deck of our boat so low, it looked like if you'd been standing up it would've taken your head off. They were just missing. And then they started firing flares over the top of us so they could get you in where you're at. They had us on radar, is what it was. And we found out later it was one of our own destroyers.

DAITCH: Really!

WEST: Yes. I don't know. We'll never know for sure. We think it was. The Japanese wasn't that good. Them shells would come over the top of the boat, and the shell would go in the water over here, and you'd say, How did the shell go over the boat and hit there? That's how close. The shell would have taken you.... Skimming the boat, the shells.

DAITCH: Wow.

WEST: On top of that, what happened, I'm at the wheel of the boat now. Liebenow said, "Let's go! Push 'em wide open and let's go." I pushed the throttle wide open and forgot to open the mufflers. I mean there was so much excitement going on there. We're firing these torpedoes, we're almost getting blown up. And as I'm pushing ahead, I said, Oh, my God! Open up the mufflers. Anyway, we got out of the range of that destroyer because we could go faster than he was. And he stopped firing. But we got in the next morning. Our mufflers were made out of copper, and they all were bulged up from the pressure of pushing [Inaudible] motor. We had three 1500 horse Packards. You

push them all forward, and then put so much pressure on the mufflers, that they were all swelled up.

DAITCH: Oh, my gosh!

WEST: So we were wondering about that, we got out and didn't get shot or sunk. We almost got sunk.

DAITCH: Yes, you were lucky.

WEST: We fired two of our own, and it helped us get our speed also. We got the weight up the stern

DAITCH: Oh, yes. Yes. Did the Japanese have boats that were similar to PT boats?

WEST: I don't know, really. I don't think so.

DAITCH: Because it makes you wonder why a U.S. destroyer would fire on something that doesn't look like anything Japanese.

WEST: Well, see, we were--being that far away, and you were setting back against the island.

DAITCH: Oh, he couldn't tell what....

WEST: They must have picked us up with the radar. They probably thought we were Jap barges. They knew that the Japanese were on that island.

DAITCH: Right. And you're right up against it.

WEST: As far as they're concerned, they didn't know we were there. So whatever it is, we're going to shoot it.

DAITCH: Yes. Right.

WEST: Give them good target practice. So the next.... They got together on it, though. They found out that it was.... We figured it was, because we figured the Japanese couldn't shoot that good. And the radar. We had the best radar.

DAITCH: Yes, yes.

WEST: It was quite a, quite a thing. When that boat fired those two torpedoes, he flashed, and that destroyer.... I think we could've gotten by with it if we'd have sat there and not moved. But he was afraid to take a chance to let that destroyer go by.

DAITCH: Yes, yes. It's just different. You know I would imagine making decisions and....

WEST: Now Liebenow would've never fired the torpedoes. See, there's the difference. He would've never fired the torpedoes. He'd have taken a chance on them going by. That's what I'm saying.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: There's a difference in your skippers.

DAITCH: Nerves of steel.

WEST: You had a feeling of him.... He's a man that I trusted so much. I trusted him. All of us did. All of us trusted him.

DAITCH: Yes, that's a great thing to have in that kind of a situation where....

WEST: We were fortunate to have him. Yes, he had something that a lot of other people don't have. He had a lot of guts, for one thing. Another thing was he used his head and not putting yourself in certain positions sometimes that'd get you sunk when other people would maybe. We had some other boats that'd do that. And that's big factor. We were blessed. My daughter says I use the word fortunate a lot. She don't like that. She says, "You were blessed." My daughter's a very religious person. Whole family is. She says, "You were blessed." I say, "Yes, I agree with you."

DAITCH: Well, certainly in that situation you want a....

WEST: Well, when I was out there, I did a lot of praying, and I think that helped me in a lot of the situations we were in. It gave you a good feeling you had somebody higher than you to help you.

DAITCH: Do you think that other.... Well, I guess everybody has their own thing, but in that situation where you were.... I mean you were in the middle of some of the worst fighting. I mean the Solomon Islands, all that island-hopping. And right in the middle of the Japanese.

WEST: Yes, we had it pretty bad there for a while. Guadalcanal had more of the Japanese ships coming down there where they were. And they didn't have many boats there then. And they had to send out what they had. They lost a lot of boats. They got blown up. A lot of the boats at Guadalcanal before we got out there, the Japanese were sending down cruisers and destroyers because we were taking Guadalcanal, and they were trying to stop us from taking it. And after we took it, they were trying to take it back. So we got in there when they were trying to take it back. So those they call it fifth.

That's why so many guys you'd get them going below when off watch. But a lot of them, a shell would hit the boat and kill everybody. That's why the only time we were below, we left the harbor at night, come back the next morning and make a pot of coffee. One guy would go down and make it, and that's it.

DAITCH: Yes, yes. I just was thinking I mean we're....

WEST: And you kept your lifejacket on all the time [Inaudible].

DAITCH: Well, a lot of what you're describing is so....

WEST: Helmet and lifejacket.

DAITCH: Yes.

WEST: Survival gear, we had a machete about this long, and you pushed it in between your .45 and your belt to help survive.

DAITCH: Yes. If you end up on an island.

WEST: I always dreaded if the boat would get hit and get taken prisoner by the Japanese. Because we were like 50 miles from base, and we ran into them all the time; we were close to them. We went to where they were.

DAITCH: Right. Yes. It's really frightening stuff. And, you know, people volunteered for PT service. [Laughter]

WEST: I didn't volunteer. I didn't know what PT boats were.

DAITCH: Yes. Well, you said you didn't.

WEST: I found out, though.

DAITCH: Yes. I just wonder. I mean it sounds romantic, but my gosh it was hard.

WEST: Oh, I was so fortunate to get on a boat like with Liebenow and the crew we had; we had a good crew.

DAITCH: Somebody told me that there was a, or I read somewhere, that there were reporters on the boat. Is that right?

WEST: You know, I don't know. We had some different people on there. But I don't know who they were. It seemed like to me there was. It seemed like to me it was, but I'm not positive. But I'm not sure if he was on our boat or not. He could've been on one of the other boats. We had one of the other boats that had a radar. They

used their radar to help us go in shore to get in to pick these people up. They laid offshore; we went in and picked them up.

DAITCH: Yes, they were just guarding your back, as it were.

WEST: Oh, yes. That and they helped us with the radar some. We had no radar. Back then they had a few boats had radar. Something I was going to say about.... He picked Liebenow to do a lot of things. He had him to go and pick up Admiral Halsey and bring him over to Treasury Island.

DAITCH: Yes, yes. That's pretty exciting.

WEST: Yes. What I mean is he'd pick him to do things like that. Wanted to make sure he didn't slip up. Liebenow will tell you, you know, he picked us because we were the best people here.

DAITCH: [Laughter] Yes. He was so nice, though. I mean he said because it's the best boat and the best crew, not the best skipper. He would never say that. If you can't think of anything else that you think is important that we should talk about, I'm going to turn the tapes off.

WEST: Yes. I can't think of....

[END SIDE 2, TAPE 2]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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