Donald B. Frost Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 01/26/2005
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Served on PT boats in the Solomon Islands during World War II; part of the rescue mission of John F. Kennedy and PT-109 in August, 1943, discusses life in the Pacific Theater, the rescue mission, and operating PT boats, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

With

Donald B. Frost

January 26, 2005
Gilford, New Hampshire

By Vicki Daitch

For the John F. Kennedy Library

DAITCH: I just want to set up the tape recorders by saying that I'm Vicki Daitch, and I'm talking to Donald Frost, who was in the Solomon Islands at the same time as Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] and was part of the rescue mission. So actually let's just start by telling me how you ended up in the Solomon Islands on a PT boat.

FROST: Well, I was of age when World War II first started. And at that time I had tried back in September to get into the Navy, but they found a couple of physical things wrong and said, no. I thought it was mostly because I was kind of small and skinny, I guess. But then World War . . . then Pearl Harbor came along, and I went down very shortly after that to enlist. But my mother said, "Well, why don't you wait

until after Christmas." And I said, "Well, okay." So on January 17th I went down and was sworn in. The first stop after being sworn in was at Newport, Rhode Island. And Newport was one of the two places then where you went through training, boot training as they called it. And we were in a building called Barracks B, which was a big, huge, training building.

Everything was big and old. And it was very, very cold, though. And of course this is in January. And January and February in Newport are the coldest places in the world, I think. Especially for us because we didn't have the kind of clothing that you'd normally have if you were home.

But we got through Newport. And at that time, they said, Where would you like to…or what would you like to do? And I said, I think I'd like to get into aviation machinist's work. So I was accepted for that. …I look back at that, and a lot of it was that I was a high school graduate, and there were so many people that weren't. They didn't get the things that they wanted, but I was always fortunate. It seemed that I was able to get what I wanted. And I thought of that, and I thought, Gee, because I was a high school graduate, that seemed to be the key to it. But being accepted as an aviation machinist's mate, then I was sent to Jacksonville, Florida, which was a big air station, training station, at that time. I spent 26 weeks in Jacksonville learning how to work on aviation machines, aviation engines.

During the latter part of all the time in Jacksonville, the question was asked, Where do you want to go? What do you want to do for assignment? And it sounded like most of those from my graduating class were going to end up in working on seaplanes, the big seaplanes. They had PBM's and PBY's at that time. And they were used mostly for anti-submarine work. And so the rumor came out that we would probably end up in Trinidad. And

that was where the big airbase was that protected the southern part of the Panama Canal from submarines. And they did a lot of patrolling out of there. The other places that they trained, of course, would be in the northern end like up around Cuba someplace. So this was…it didn't sound too good for a lot of us. They said, Gee, I don't want to spend the whole war sitting in a PBY or a PBM. I want to go out where the action is.

So at that time on the bulletin board there was a poster that said if you were interested in volunteering for PT boats, you know, put your name down. Well, about 20 out of my particular company that was in Jacksonville at that time said they'd love to go to the PT boats. So I was one of the 20 from my class that went, and we were accepted. The reason behind that was that aviation engines were quite similar to the engines that were in PT boats, which were Packard V-12 engines and that were water-cooled rather than air-cooled, and a different type of engine. But basically if you were an engine man, as we were then, then you wouldn't have as much problem in working on a PT boat engine.

So we all were sent to Boston to the Fargo Building. Then within a couple of weeks we were sent down to Melville, Rhode Island, which is just this side of Newport. This again was in the middle of the winter, which is a rough place, going back to Newport in the wintertime. And in those cases we had a lot of snow as well as the cold. But we graduated from PT boats. I think it was like 12 weeks we were in Melville. There was a nice training center there. It had nice docks. And we had boats that we could ride on and get the experience. And we went through all of the different classes. There was a lot more to it than just training for the engine work. Because if you were in a small crew of say 12 people on a PT boat, you couldn't just say, Well, I only work on engines, nothing else. You had to learn how to work on guns because you were going to be firing the guns, and you had to be

able to clean guns and so forth. You also had to know something about navigation and something about torpedoes and the whole bit. So we went through a lot of various classes then in operating the PT boats. Then after graduation from that, they sent us to our squadrons. I ended up in Squadron 9.

DAITCH: Actually, can I ask you a question about the training before we move on to your squadron?

FROST: Sure.

DAITCH: I know that as an enlisted person you might have taken some different classes. But did the…because I think Kennedy did training at Melville, too. Would officer training people have taken some of the same classes that you did for the same reasons?

FROST: Yes, yes. A lot of them did because they had to know things that needed to be done. And actually the enlisted men did most of it. But the officers had to know all the same things, too. Because they were in charge of the whole works. So if anything went wrong, they had to have some idea as to what needed to be done. So they had all gone through some sort of officer training anyway. Most of them were college fellows, not long out of college either. And, you know, they had recruited them out of college. Some of the officers, then, who had just come back from the Philippines, went to some of the colleges like Harvard and Yale and so forth and recruited young men for the PT

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boats.

Of course, this was quite interesting. I mean any red-blooded American boy wants to get into something exciting. And so we did end up with a lot of officers then who came from very wealthy families or were…above the average kid that comes out of college. Most of them did have a lot going for them. In some cases, politicians, of course, entered into it. And in this case Kennedy, of course, came in because of his father's [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.] know-how and ability to get his son into the Navy and into PT boats. You can understand, though, that Kennedy, of course, had a seagoing background because off of Cape Cod, naturally, he spent a lot of his time on boats and sailing. He'd loved the ocean. So it wouldn't be surprising for anybody with that background to want something like a PT boat.

DAITCH: Right. Did any of the other people that you actually went to school with, do you remember any of those as being similar to Kennedy in that way?

FROST: Yes. And I don't remember a lot of the names of those people. But during the time we were there, you know, on the boats, and somebody would mention a name and say, "Oh, yeah, he's the son of…." "Oh, yeah, I

know who that is." You know, that sort of thing. And so, as I said, I don't remember all of their…a lot of their names. I know none really outside of Kennedy. And probably wouldn't have remembered Kennedy either if it hadn't been for the *109* and the fact that he made president.

DAITCH: Right.

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FROST: Because up until that time he was just another junior officer on a boat.

DAITCH: Right.

FROST: And that was it.

DAITCH: Yes. Let's go back to you were getting your squadron assignment then.

FROST: We were assigned to Squadron 9. And at that time it was being made up in Brooklyn Navy Yard. There were two basic kinds of PT boats. One was made by the Electric Boat Company, and that was located in Bayonne, New Jersey. And the other one was the Higgins Boat, and those were made down in New Orleans, Louisiana. There was another boat called a Huckens boat, which was made in Florida, but the Huckens never really made too many of our boats. Mostly all Higgins and ELCO. ELCO made beautiful yachts before the war. And so their way of doing it was already started by building these beautiful yachts that they had. But they did have to change the boat around to put more speed into it. And of course if you're going to have a speed boat, you're going to have to change the hull and so forth. The hull that was adopted actually came from an English boat, and from that they adapted it with the Electric Boat Company.

DAITCH: Was this a military boat or some other kind of boat?

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FROST: No. Well, it was. It was. . . . I'm trying to think of the name that developed these speed boats, and they used them for racing. This was prior to World War II. But actually when they started talking about building a boat, they needed something to go by. And so they adopted this one. They had really built some boats prior to World War II. I think they had like about a dozen of them. And these were sort of a prototype that they built by Electric Boat Company. And they were stationed out in the Philippines.

And if you remember the story now, MacArthur [Douglas MacArthur], when the Japanese took over a great share of the Philippines, MacArthur was backed into a corner, you might say. And he was told by the president to get out of the Philippines. They wanted him to get out and not give his life just to be there. …There were no aircraft that could fly him out. The Japanese by this time had moved right in. They were on Corregidor eventually, and they

had no place to go. PT boats served to be the only way that they could get out of there. So MacArthur and his wife and some of his subordinates were put on a PT boat, and they were taken out of the Philippines, running by night, and stopping here and there. They did have problems all the way, and that made quite a story in itself, how they got out of there. But they did finally get out far enough where they did find an airport, and from that airport were flown to Australia. And then MacArthur was returned to the States. And of course from there on then became, you know, quite a personality in World War II ultimately out in the Solomon Islands area.

When…we were put onto boats down in New York, in Brooklyn. Again, it was in the middle of the winter. We had no heat on the boats, and it was really a rough winter because they did want one person to stay on the boat to kind of watch for problems in case of

freezing and so forth. Well, it was really cold. Luckily, we survived. Later a lot of us, lived in the YMCA in Brooklyn because it was so cold, and we didn't want to sleep on the boat. So if you didn't have to be on the boat, you went to the YMCA and slept. But Brooklyn Navy Yard at that time was really active, had a lot of things going on. We had to go back over to Bayonne, New Jersey, during that time and be outfitted with our armament, with our torpedo tubes and the guns and all the other things that hadn't been on there. So we spent two or three weeks over in Bayonne getting outfitted.

DAITCH: Did you help put the things on the boat?

FROST: Huh?

DAITCH: Did you help actually put the things on the boat, the torpedoes. . . ?

FROST: No. We learned how to use some of them that were on there. What we had, we had four torpedo tubes, and these were the big, old torpedoes. These were leftovers from World War I. At that time they decided that they would put them into mothballs on Torpedo Island, which is located in Narragansett Bay, not too far from where Melville is. And they would take these torpedoes, and every so many months or years or whatever, they would go through them and upgrade them and change the mechanism or whatever needed to be done. And those were the torpedoes that we started off with on PT boats. Sorry to say, a lot of them didn't work too well, and they didn't do what they were supposed to do, and they didn't function. There were a lot of problems with those until finally they

were removed later in the war. But that was part of the putting things on to the boats, the guns and all the other things that needed to be done.

And of course everything was strange and new to us, too. We didn't get a chance to really find out how our own boat worked that well. We had gone through training in

Melville. Here we are. We've got our own boat that wasn't that simple. And, you know, when the skipper said, Well, now, we're going to have to light off and work our way over through, you know, from Brooklyn Navy Yard over to Bayonne, New Jersey, and you'd say, Oh, boy! I remember being down in the engine room as part of this thing, you know, and I would say, I don't know what I'm doing down here. [Laughter] Because it wasn't quite as simple as just putting something in gear and going, you know. I mean there were a lot of things that had to be done as far as starting these things up and all the other things that needed to be done. But we survived that.

And then they put us on a ship, and we were to be sent down to the Panama Canal. One of the problems we ran into . . . and this has always been a bit of a funny story . . . is that we started out of the Verrazano Bridge, or under the bridge, going out of the New York Navy Yard, and out to sea on this ship. And there were two of us on board. This was a small tanker, and it was heading for Aruba to pick up a load of oil or gasoline or whatever. Then it was going to go from Aruba to Panama and drop us off, and then it would head back. We get out there, and we were waiting for a convoy, and we were going to be part of a convoy then heading south with tankers and freighters and whatever. And when we got out there, though, they found out they had a leaky tank up in the bow. And they had pumps pumping the water out, but it was coming in faster than the pumps could pump it out. So we had to turn around and come back in, and the convoy sailed without us. We went back in again.

This tank up in the bow somewhere, they filled it up with cement. And of course cement sets in water or whatever, but the tank was sealed off so it didn't get anymore water in it. And then we headed back out again.

Well, by this time the convoy, of course, had gone. And there wasn't another one around. So they said, Well, just proceed on your own. So we headed for Aruba then in Submarine Alley, if you wanted to call it that. Once we got to Aruba, we got our load of oil, and then we headed for Panama. During that time we saw a lot of beautiful oil slicks where ships had been sunk because German submarines were really thick around that area. But we survived it, never saw one. We were unloaded in Panama. And went through the Panama Canal on our own a few days later. We ended up on a little island about 20 miles off the coast of Panama, called Taboga. It sounds quite similar to Trinidad and Tobago, but it's spelled a little bit differently. It was a resort place for the Panamanians. They had a dock where you could get off, and people would spend a weekend or a day out there on this island. We used that as a base to train on. So from there we would go on training cruises all over that whole area. That was quite interesting. It was warm. We spent Christmas there, and for the first time it wasn't winter. It was winter, but it was warm.

DAITCH: Right.

FROST: There were several squadrons there training at the same time. The officers, of course, were getting training in navigation and seamanship and the whole thing that you'd need. Later, after, I don't know,

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about a month or so down there in Panama, we were loaded onto another tanker. This time we were headed for Nouméa, New Caledonia. This was going to be the unloading spot down there.

DAITCH: Now was this, I'm trying to get the timing straight, this was about 1942, in the spring?

FROST: Yes.

DAITCH: Starting to be spring?

FROST: This was an interesting trip. None of us had ever been to sea before like this. I mean going out into the Pacific and across. And part of that was fun in a sense. We had the crossing the equator, of course, with all the ceremony and King Neptune and the queen and all the rest of them. Of course, it's quite a hazing-type of thing. But it's done…. You might say it's a long trip across the ocean, and this was one way that you broke up the monotony of the trip, was to have this whole-day thing. It was quite interesting. But we did end up in Nouméa, New Caledonia. The whole thing was French. The French had…and I guess they spoke French there. We stayed there, oh, probably a couple of weeks anyway. And then we were to go up through the whole chain of islands all the way from New Caledonia all the way up through to the Solomon Islands. That's about a 1500-mile trip that we made on our own. Three or four boats would go up at a

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time.

DAITCH: On the PT boats?

FROST: On the PT boats. We were unloaded from the big ship. And when we were on these tankers, they had what they called a cradle. And a cradle was a…the cradle was built to conform to the shape of the PT boat, and they could put them right onto a deck. And then they could lower the PT boat right onto it, and it could be lashed down. And the cradle itself was lashed down so it wouldn't move around in storms. As far as I know, none of the boats were ever damaged from being set on the cradles or going awry in a storm. We did have a couple of tankers that were torpedoed by Japanese submarines. And Squadron 10, if I remember right, the squadron after ours, was torpedoed somewhere not too far from Nouméa when they were coming in. So they lost a couple of their boats when it went down. Some of them floated away, and others were banged up and crippled.

But going up the chain of islands from Nouméa all the way up through was quite an interesting experience. The islands themselves are very, very beautiful and lush, and, oh, they smelled so nice when you'd go by, and you could smell all the flowers and things. There

were natives, although we didn't see too much of the natives as we went up through the islands. We would stop at night normally, and there would be some sort of a small coastal tanker that had come in and anchored there. They had gasoline in 50-gallon drums. So when we came up, we would go alongside the tanker and then crank this gasoline out by hand pump into our boat. Well, a PT boat holds 3,000 gallons of gasoline. Now, we didn't use up all 3,000 gallons. And we went slowly, and we operated on one or two

engines rather than trying to see how fast we could go. We tried to conserve gasoline, but even so, it was quite a job to fill up the tanks that we had used so that we could get going through the next day.

Some of the officers would go ashore, and they had missionaries there. So they'd meet them and talk with some of them, and it was quite interesting. After the islands…the next stop that we made was up in Espíritu Santo, which at that time was a big headquarters for ships. And the reason it was chosen was that Japanese bombers probably did not have the range to get to Espíritu Santo. And so this is why a lot of shipping and transferring of products was done or whatever was done in Espíritu Santo. We stayed there just a short time, probably a week or so, then headed towards Guadalcanal and Tulaghi. Tulaghi was the PT boat base. It's about 20 miles across from Guadalcanal to Tulaghi. The base had already been set up when we got there, and it had seen a lot of action because this was…what they called The Slot. And if one could see on a chart or map of that area, you saw that the islands up above them were on one side and then like a big open area down through, and Guadalcanal and some of the other islands on the other side. So the Japanese coming down would come down through that area. And it was called The Slot because it was wide enough for large ships to come down through. And they could reinforce the islands as they came down through.

Guadalcanal was a very important island for the Japanese, and they'd had an airfield there and the whole bit, and really wanted to keep Guadalcanal. The Marines had landed and had done a lot in acquiring the island from the Japanese. So that when we got there, there weren't too many Japanese left on the island. They had been evacuated. We in turn, though, had to go out on patrol when we first got there. We patrolled just about as soon as we got

there to relieve some of the other people that had been patrolling nights. So we would go out about every other night and patrol. There wasn't too much action for us there because most of the larger Japanese ships didn't come down through, just small ones that would relieve the crews . . . the Japanese military and take them out of there.

DAITCH: Did you feel, by that time, pretty good about the boat, about the way you were managing it and how to run it, all that sort of thing?

FROST: Yes. Well, I think Panama, when we were out training down in Panama, we went on some extensive trips. And some of those were quite interesting. I was trying to think of the name of the islands down there off from South America. I can't think of them right now. But we had gone down through these islands, a navigational type of thing. But in using that type of training, though, you got familiar with all of the things that needed to be done. Because we could get out in the middle and have target practice, and somebody'd drop something off the side, and then we'd go way out and see if we could hit it, you know. So there were a lot of things, and we did a lot of night exercises because we needed to know how to do all these things in the dark, too.

Then getting back to the story, though, I guess that we went from Tulaghi then…the next move was up to Munda. Munda was the next airbase above Guadalcanal, and that's where the Japanese wanted to keep that one. They lost Guadalcanal. And so here we are, we've got to keep Munda. So this was quite an important invasion there. And from there on in it was island-hopping. And one way then was to get the Japanese and starve them out or to keep them from getting a lot of supplies, ammunition, or whatever they needed to hold onto

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these islands. So it was a matter of us then harassing them, if nothing else. The Japanese still had big ships coming down to supply, big ships meaning destroyers or above, that the Japanese would use to bring down supplies and unload more troops and so forth. And that was where the PT boaters came in because we could make runs on these destroyers when they came down through. So we had several pitched battles with destroyers, which was quite exciting. I won't go into details on some of them. But they were quite interesting.

As we moved toward the north on the islands, though, the Japanese were getting rather short-handed. Their ships, of course, were being sunk at a good-sized rate. Not by us necessarily, but when they were involved in large sea battles. The Japanese lost a good share of their ships and their planes and the whole bit. To the point where they didn't want to lose more by trying to keep the Solomons. So they were kind of backpedaling a lot during that time and not risking sending their big ships down there because they were too hard to come by. So what they did was to change their tactics, and shipping things down was done by barge. Those barges were big barges, but they were shallow draft, and they could maneuver them from one island to the next island and so forth. And, of course, our job then was to find different barges and see what we could do to break up the barges from moving troops back and forth and moving supplies. So it was quite an interesting thing. And we became not torpedo boats as much as barge-busters, they called them.

DAITCH: How did you do that?

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FROST: Well, three or four boats would go out on patrol. Most of the time we were based on an island, and it would be at Rendova, then it might move up to Treasure Island [Treasury Islands], and then Treasure Island went to

Empress Augusta Bay, another one further up. Eventually there were smaller bases set up on different islands, which made it easier for maybe a squadron then to patrol a certain area. And eventually then we ended up at Green Island, which is the most northern island on the Solomon Islands chain. So by that time I had been out there about 18 months in all. It was quite a stint that we had doing all these things.

The barge traffic then became quite important to the Japanese. And we in turn were out there to see what we could do to sink the barges or damage them or whatever. And if nothing else, it was a psychological war, too. The fact that we were there, they didn't know that we were there, and they would see us or we would see them, and somebody would fire on them. Well, it became pretty dangerous. It's interesting that we never really knew what we hit or how badly we hit them or whatever because this is all pitch black at night. And if there's no moon, it is really dark out there because there are no lights of any sort at all. The islands, of course, are pitch black. There's nothing to identify one island from another except the height maybe. But on real black nights you couldn't see anything. You couldn't tell…. Of course the boats didn't have any lights on them either. So when you're patrolling with another boat, you couldn't see the boat if it was pitch black. And it was quite interesting to do this. And so you really had to have good eyesight, night vision, to be able to find a barge which is somewhere going up alongside the shore of this island. And then be able to fire on it. A lot of times they could see us before we could see them. So they would fire on us. And that was good because….

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DAITCH: Then you had a target.

FROST: And then we had something to shoot at. [Laughter] And we always felt that they were bum shots. So they were hiding because their shots always went above our boat. And whether they thought that we were bigger than what we were or whether they were hunkered down behind some sort of armor plate or whatever…. But occasionally they came close, naturally, and bullets would hit into the boat. I don't know that we had too many that were sunk by that, by boats being hit by barge traffic guns.

A lot of our boats, it seemed like were hit by bombs. They did have a plane that would come from somewhere, and he would fly at night. They used to call him "Washing Machine Charlie." Now that's kind of an odd name. And why washing machine I don't know, except that the early washing machines were run with gasoline engines. And so they made various sounds, I guess, when they were washing clothes. I don't know.

But anyway, these planes were Japanese planes. They were small, single-engine planes, and they would carry probably two bombs. The interesting part of being out in the South Pacific is that there's a fluorescence in the water which is sort of a greenish-white color. And anything at night that moves out there shows…the fluorescence will light up the water, and you can practically read a newspaper on the stern of a boat when you went because this water then would be stirred up and this fluorescence then would light up. One of the problems with that was that if you were in a PT boat and proceeding ahead at any speed

at all, the turbulence then from the boat would cause this whole thing then to light up. And if you were in a plane up above, you could look down and say, Uh oh, and

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there was a boat. And now the plane, if he could figure, well now, okay, if I lead that turbulence just a little bit, I can probably drop one right on him. But with only two bombs, he had a limited chance to hit them, hit a boat. A lot of times when we could hear him coming, and knew that he was circling around up there, we couldn't see him, but we knew that some way he was going to drop these bombs, one or two of them.

And so the best idea then was to stop the engine and sit and wait for him to do something. If you could see him or whatever, you might fire at him. But you couldn't just fire up in the air at a plane that couldn't be seen. And a lot of times then you might do something, tactics, such as maybe let a puff of smoke out of your smoke generator, which we carried on the stern of the boat, and then move away from that. And then let him see that and think that he's going to bomb that. Or another one, if there was any activity by water at all, if it was around an island and there might be a rock sticking up, then they'd see the fluorescence around the rock. And sometimes the Japanese plane would drop its bomb on a rock. So it was always kind of a fun thing to kind outfox the Japanese plane that was overhead.

DAITCH: Yes.

FROST: But in between times, though, it was quite exciting, I'd say, at night because you never knew what was going to happen. We were on patrol…we'd leave base probably about sunset. Now if you're out in the tropics like that, sunset is usually about six o'clock at night and sunrise at six o'clock in the morning. And so you'd just keep on with that kind of a schedule. It doesn't change much over a period of time. And so we would leave base at six o'clock at night and be on patrol then, be on station I guess you'd

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say, and that would be like seven o'clock at night. It'd be dark by then. And we'd stay on patrol, patrolling a certain area, probably three boats at a time with what they call an echelon. An echelon is sort of like an angle so that the lead boat, and then there's another one farther back, and a third one farther back from them. And the lead boat then would have the area that he's supposed to cover because with the boats spread out in an echelon like that, even though you couldn't see, if you're all going about the same speed, you'll cover quite an area. So from that then the person who was in charge, he might do this for a couple of hours, and then another boat would come up beside him and say, "Why don't I take over and you drop back?" And so then the other fellow then would be in charge of taking the boats and running up the prescribed area where they were supposed to patrol.

DAITCH: Did you have radios that you would communicate?

FROST: We had radios. But in most cases they claimed that they wanted no communications by radio. They thought the Japanese could pick up our radio messages. I'm not sure that they could or not. But the fact that we couldn't use the radios a lot of times made it very, very awkward. Because being so dark out there at night, you didn't know exactly where these other boats were. And especially if somebody said, "Be on the alert. There's a destroyer or two destroyers coming down in your area." Now you didn't know exactly where they were coming. But if they did what you thought they were going to do, then they were heading right for you. But in the darkness, of course, you couldn't see them. They weren't using lights either. So to be able to see a ship of any size coming at you, the ship would probably be right on top of you before you realized that it was

there. And for the same reason we couldn't always see our own boats, as well as we couldn't see the barges we were supposed to be watching for. So it was quite interesting as to, you know, making the decision we've got to do something here when we can't see what we'd like to, and we didn't have radar in those days.

DAITCH: I can imagine it would be risky just driving your boat up next to the guy in front of you to say, "I'll take over for a while." Because what if he thinks you're an enemy?

FROST: Yes. Well, I don't know if there was much yelling or talking either. Because we were close enough to the islands so that, you know, voices carried quite a ways. But I think, and this was…. You know another thing when we were patrolling. As I said, we carried 3,000 gallons of gasoline. Now if you were to run those three engines that we had at full speed, that probably wouldn't last a night. What you did then when you got on the patrol…. Now you went on patrol with three engines and going at a fairly good clip. Now that in PT boat language was around 30-35 knots, somewhere under 40 miles an hour if you want to use that language. But the PT boat, if it was in good shape, and we tried very much to keep our boats in good shape, meaning mechanically, the engines and so forth. Sometimes if you carried too much ammunition and all that, it slowed it down; if you carried too many people, it slowed it down naturally. It's an 80-foot boat. But 80 feet is a good-sized boat and it was wide so that it carried its own crew. But you wouldn't want to overload her.

One of the things as we became more barge-busters rather than a torpedo boat, was

eventually they said, Why are we carrying all this weight of the torpedoes around when we don't ever use them? Why don't we take those torpedoes off? Well, by this time they had taken the torpedo tubes off that we had and put on an aircraft torpedo, the kind that is dropped from an aircraft. And these then were much lighter because we did away with the big heavy torpedo tubes. And they were a smaller torpedo. But they were designed as a

modern-day torpedo and could do a lot of damage in being a smaller torpedo. And so we carried four of those for a while.

DAITCH: Would that have been the kind that was on the *109* when it was hit? Or would that have been after that?

FROST: I think they probably carried the old variety. That's for the big, long torpedo. And I don't remember the number…they used to go by Mark 14 or whatever, you know. That was fired electrically. On the back part of each torpedo tube was sort of a thing you could put a six-inch shell in there. And it was like a blank because there was no projectile attached to them. But you could put this thing in, and it was a very high-explosive shell. And the torpedo is a tight fit in this tube. But they grease it all the way around so that it slid into the tube and covered with grease. And when you wanted to fire the torpedo, you trained it out. In other words, you could have a crank with a big long screw arrangement that trained the torpedo out so that it wouldn't…when it went off, it didn't land on deck; it would land outside the side of the boat. And you could press a button up on the bridge where the controls were, and it would set off this six-inch shell down there, which then, as it went off, it blew behind the torpedo…. Am I rambling too much?

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DAITCH: No. This is very good, useful information. I just want to change the side….

FROST: As the six-inch shell went off then, it would blow the torpedo out. Now one of the problems with that was…it was a shell; it was gunpowder that went off. As the torpedo then cleared the torpedo tube, a lot of times the powder from the shell that went off would also light off the grease….[Change to Side B of Tape]

There'd be a flash of light. Now it didn't last too long. Most of the time somebody would douse it somehow, you know, to keep it from flaming anymore. But it was kind of a giveaway device in what it did. With the torpedo type from the aircraft, now, there was no explosive at all. It was attached by cables that went around it, and the only problem with this was that you had to pull the handle by hand. And when you pulled the handle, the cables just released the torpedo. It fell off the side. The torpedo the minute it hit the water was able to do its own thing. It straightened itself out, it sought the right depth, and the whole thing. It was all quite mechanically fixed up from there. Later, as I said, a lot of times they weren't using the torpedoes at all. The chances are that they wouldn't ever be using torpedoes because there was nothing to shoot torpedoes at. So they were….

DAITCH: Were the barges too shallow to shoot a torpedo at?

FROST: Huh?

DAITCH: Why didn't you use torpedoes on the barges?

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FROST: A torpedo normally has to have at least five feet of water. And the reason it does is that it will porpoise. Because oceans are never perfectly smooth, even though you can't see it, there is movement. And of course it might be a foot or so up and down. But if it's enough, of course, then the torpedo will come through, go up in the air and back down again, seek another five feet, and then porpoise again. It will do this. Now of course the whole thing is it makes the torpedo erratic. And so they're not too good to be used with anything more than a five feet draft on the ship. So the barges probably only drew about two feet of water. In other words if you put the barge down and measured from the water line to the bottom of it, it would be like two feet. Torpedo boats didn't draw too much water either. Ours, I think, were like, oh, maybe two and a half, three feet. And if you loaded them enough, you'd probably sink it down to about four feet. But if you did, then you wouldn't get as much speed because you need to have a shallow-draft boat for making much speed.

But the torpedoes were removed, and they put on heavier guns; because up until this time we were using what they called clip 50's, 50-caliber machine guns. And these guns were very powerful and very easy to operate, and they had turrets. One turret was up near the cockpit, and the other turret would be back behind them. So that normally if you were firing, of course, you couldn't fire across the boat too well. So that these you'd have more fire power from one side, and then you made a turn and fired the other side thing. On the bow some boats had put a machine gun up there. Later they put a 37mm gun up there, which was much bigger than some of the others, and they had…. The first ones were adopted from some sort of an anti-tank gun, which was on a wheeled device. And they could use that for a

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tank. We adopted it by reinforcing the bow, the deck of the bow I should say, and then mounting some sort of a triangular type of mount that you could put the gun on. The problem with that was you couldn't have it too high. So that meant that the person that was firing the gun practically had to be down on his hands and knees to be able to shoot.... If you're up on the bow of any boat or ship, you're bound to be up and down a little bit, especially if there are other boats around. And so it wasn't too accurate. So you could fire in the general direction and hope.

The stern now, where we did have what we called a 20mm gun…that was called an Oerlichen gun. It was a German-style gun, I guess. That was on a higher pedestal and could swing around, and you could fire all except forward. You could fire both sides and the stern with that gun there. Some of the boats had that removed and put on what they called a 40mm. Now the 40mm was a much bigger gun; and it took two people, though, and that was the kind that you see sometimes when one fellow was cranking the thing to make it go up and down, and the other fellow's cranking it to make it go around. And so it took two people. So one guy was cranking it with his hand and swing it over, and then the other guy was cranking it up and down, depending on whether you're firing at an airplane or a barge or whatever. They were more powerful. And of course the two people that were on there then. Then you had to

have a couple of people that helped with loading the ammunition because they only took clips which were five or six shells in a clip. They had to be put down in the gun, and then somebody had to go get some more of them.

But the problem with all of this changing the battlement was that you reduced the load of the weight of the boat by taking off the torpedo tubes. But then you put on some heavy guns, and then you had to increase the amount of ammunition that was carried. And

then you had to increase the number of personnel that you had to fire the guns and load them and so forth. So pretty soon you ended up not as a torpedo boat but as a gunboat. And it wasn't really meant to be. But it really did a job. And, of course, we did not have any gunboat as such. The torpedo boats then were already there. Well, let's put some more guns on them, and we can still do a job but different from what we started out with.

DAITCH: I had just read somewhere, I don't know how accurate this is, but that Kennedy had had just not long before they had sunk the *109*, that they had put one of those guns that you were talking about on the bow, I think.

FROST: Yes. A lot of them did mount. The one that we had, the 37mm that was put on the bow, somebody off of the boat found this somewhere. They had gone ashore at one of the bases, and, hey, let's get a gun, you know. And that was the way a lot of things were done. It wasn't something that came from Washington.

DAITCH: Right.

FROST: It was done right there and let's try it. And they'd broach it to the skipper, and the skipper would, "Gee, it sounds good to me." And the skippers might have done the same thing. They found it somewhere. Or somebody was able to find two, and we'll give you one. And so…. But a lot of it was done by the people on the boat or…. All of us had some sort of a base force. Now a base force were people who would come to the boat and do things that we couldn't do. Now, for instance, we had little

refrigerators. Now they weren't very good, and they were quite small. They were like a travel trailer might have because we were feeding ten people, 12 people. They weren't designed to carry a lot of frozen food or anything like that. It was just a small refrigerator. But we weren't trained to do anything with the refrigerators. But we had a person on the base that was trained, and he could come out and repair the refrigerator or recharge it or whatever had to be done. We may have problems with an engine. So we would have to go to a base further down the line where they did engine work. In other words, take the engine right out, put a new engine in.

We didn't usually do big jobs on board boats. We could change spark plugs, and we could do all that sort of thing, sort of maintenance-type jobs. But we weren't in a position where we could take engines out unless we were on a bigger base, and that was a base like Tulaghi or something. A representative from Packard Company would come out and show all the new ways of doing them. In some cases we started out with boats then that had engines which were sort of early engines. And they had like 1250 horsepower in one engine. Well, later they souped them up a little bit, put some superchargers on them, and changed things around, and pretty soon we had them up to 1500 horsepower. And by the time the war ended, I think they were up to somewhere around 1800 horsepower by changing things around. But when that came out, then we would've been back to a base and have a new engine installed. And in some cases the engines, of course, were like an automobile engine; they're only good for so many hours. And then they get to that point where they need to be changed. They have lost their speed or something wasn't working properly, and it wasn't something you could change on board the boat. We'd change an engine.

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DAITCH: So the sort of typical thing that you were doing, I don't know, was it like five days a week that you would go out at night and do the patrols?

FROST: I'll take Munda, I guess, as a good example. When we first came up in that area, we had found the base, and we were invading Munda. So the first, oh, I'd say for the first three or four days, we were there, we were out every night. You know, wind them up at six o'clock at night, and we were gone until morning. Come back in the morning, and it meant we had to do maintenance work, we had to fill up the gasoline tanks, and if we were lucky there was a space for us at the gas dock. We would come alongside, and they would fill our tanks for us. Then we'd have to come back and do, you know, check the engines and strip the guns down, clean them, get them ready. Because even if they're not fired, they do get salty, and you can't leave them too long. You have to keep them up in good shape if you're going to use them. Then for the engine, then, of course, we're down there changing plugs or changing oil and all the other things that are needed to keep the engines in good shape. Even the radioman would have to do something with his radio and make sure that was okay. And, you know, we had to do some map work, navigation; that was the quartermaster's job. And so everybody was busy during the day. And the problem was, though, when do you sleep?

DAITCH: Right. Exactly.

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FROST: Now the engine room gang and some of the others now, we…there were three of us on board, three engine room men and usually they were, oh, like a first class who was in charge, and then whatever second class who was next in charge, and then we'd have a third class. And these are the three guys that are running the engine room. And the engines were real heavy engines, very, very noisy

naturally. They're big, and they made a lot of noise. And of course it's hot down in the South Pacific, and it never cools down a great deal. Even when it rains, it stays hot. And so to stay down in an engine room with three hot engines and the heat of course doesn't drip out of there, and we didn't have air-conditioning. So whatever cool air you got was from these big funnels of course. When you were moving ahead, they forced air, cooler air, down. But if you weren't moving, if you were on patrol and you were just moving ahead on one engine, you didn't get too much air cooling at all. And the heat was tremendous. And so we would spend an hour at a time so you'd get two hours off, one hour on. And hopefully you could catch a nap in between if Washing Machine Charlie wasn't there and all the other things that went on, such as going to general quarters and firing on barges and all the other things. So it wasn't like you could just take a nap for two hours and then wake up and go on watch and then take another two hours off. It wasn't that simple.

DAITCH: Right.

FROST: And yet when you…during the day again, once the sun came up, it was hot, hot and humid.

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DAITCH: What did the officers do while…when you're on shore and everybody has their assignments and you're working on your engines?

FROST: I think…they had paperwork, of course. They had drills. Every boat, every ship in the Navy has to keep a ship's log. And that log is like a diary. It tells what the crew…or tells what the boat or the ship has done for that day. And in some cases, you know, it wouldn't be too much. Other times if you wrote down what happened out there, something happened like a boat being caught on coral reef and the things that would need to be done to get that boat off and so forth. I mean it could go on quite a way. They also…. As we came in in the morning, most of the officers would go ashore for a meeting, and during that meeting have to talk about what they did that night and some of the problems that came up. Prior to going out in the afternoon, there was another meeting as to where they were going, what they were going to do, who's going with you, how are we going to do certain things, okay?

So they had meetings they had to do. And like the rest of us, they had to sleep, too. Because the officers didn't…they were up all the time. They didn't get a chance to nap or anything at night. There were two officers, the skipper, as we called him, and the exec. And in some cases we even had a third officer, but it wasn't designed to have three officers on board. But if the exec was qualified, yes, he could take over and the skipper could maybe take a little nap, you know. By nap meaning you had on your life jacket and your helmet and the whole bit, and you just kind of found a place out of the wind and kind of crawled in for a little while. And you always slept up topside. Very, very few people would go down below and sleep because it was too hard to get in and out of those places. We had a ladder

that brought you up to the chartroom, and then from there you had another couple of steps to get up into the cockpit. But if somebody said, you know, we're about ready to fire, and called everybody to general quarters, then you needed to be right there because maybe you'd be fired on within just a few minutes. You didn't want to be caught sleeping, you know. But the officers were kept busy. They did a lot of things that officers do. I think, yes, such as meetings and talking with their superiors as to what they were going to do and how they were going to do it.

DAITCH: I was just wondering how hands on. I suppose it varied from officer to officer.

FROST: Yes, yes…. I know one time we were going to paint the boats. And painting has a little knack of its own as to how you paint. And the officers all wanted to help paint. Now what we were doing was that when you go into combat and to help from being seen, everything that is shiny back there in the United States needs to be covered up. So even all this beautiful brass and all that stuff, you had to paint it. And I remember this one time we had an officer, and I don't think he'd ever had a paintbrush in his hand before. And he was going to paint. Well, he made an awful mess out of this thing, you know. It made you laugh, you know, because most people have used a paintbrush and know how to do it. But he was going in one direction. Then the other direction. And, oh, no! you know. You know it was interesting. The officers chipped in, and they did a lot of work like that, too. I mean it didn't have to be changing guns or cleaning guns or anything. But they were usually pretty handy.

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DAITCH: Did the crews of the different boats hang out together? Or did you kind of hang out with your own boat?

FROST: If we were on a base, say, that we went up to Russell Island. I liked Russell Island because that was such a beautiful spot we were in. They had these huge, huge trees, and I'm not sure whether they were eucalyptus or what they were. But they were growing on the shore, and they leaned out over the water, and it was like other trees behind them pushed them out…pushed them out. And the easiest way then was to grow out over the water. And we would tie up you might say in the crotch of one of these limbs then. Now down below us was coral. The whole island was coral. And the coral then was, oh, probably where we were tied right up practically to the land. But this huge tree limb came out, and we were able to tie up to that. Below us was probably about 12 feet of beautiful clear water. Oh, it was so beautiful! You could look down and see the fish all swimming around. And we used to swim in there just about everyday. Let's go swimming. Okay! And, you know, there were no restrictions. You know you could do what you wanted to as long as you got your chores done and got your guns cleaned and all that stuff. And then you could go swimming or whatever you wanted to do.

But there was such a beautiful island. Now what…you know some of the problems you run into, well, now, how do you eat? Well, the boats were small. They had a little generator, gasoline generator, and that would have electricity enough to satisfy some light bulbs, small light bulbs, and you could even have a coffeemaker and you could have I think it was either a three- or four-burner electric stove like you'd have in a camper trailer for a cook. And most of these cooks were not really trained to be cooks. And for them to make three

meals a day for ten or 12 men would be quite a chore. So as soon as we went up to these bases then, we would set up a base mess hall. So that the other people either could walk down in front of the boats if you were tied up to land. Or they would have a landing craft which would come across the stern of the boats as they were headed into the land, and you'd jump off onto this landing craft which then took you down to the mess hall. So they would take half the crew would go for the first meal. And when they came back, then the other half jumped in, and they went down for their meal. So that you always had half the crew on board in base.

DAITCH: Yes.

FROST: But the meals in most cases were okay. But the big problem was getting food to the outlying bases like ours. We didn't get too many big supply ships coming into the Solomon Islands. And so distribution of food was very slim. There were some places where we went, I'm trying to think of the names of some of them, where most of this whole island, the Solomon Islands, are owned by soap companies: Palmolive and some of these companies.

DAITCH: Really!

FROST: Yes. And they had these huge, huge coconut plantations. And that's where they'd get their oil for their soap. And so it was interesting that they hired like Australians and so forth to work on these coconut plantations, and I guess they

even had some of the native there, too. On one of the islands where we tied up, they had horses and cows. The interesting part of that was that, oh, boy, now we can have beef because they have cows over there. Good idea except that somebody came up with the thought that cows get TB, and there might be a good chance of these cows that are over there probably have never been inoculated or whatever. And so would have TB.

DAITCH: Oh, no.

FROST: And somebody said, "Well, yes, but horses don't get TB. So why don't we eat horse meat?" So they built a big corral, and so then they killed off a horse or two. And I don't know how many they killed off. These were wild horses, of course. But it was the chewiest meat I think I've ever had. And it had some flavor to it, but I only say that because it was one of the aspects of living on the boat; we lived very, very rough. You know we didn't have showers. There was one little bowl way up on the bow, and that was used for, you know, toilet-type things, and it had one little sink in there. For that many men, you know, your chance of getting up there were pretty slim. Most of the time was let's go over on the beach somewhere, you know, and take care of that sort of thing. The same way with showering. We had no shower, so it was just a matter of you wanted a shower, then you could dive in the water and use saltwater soap. That is not the greatest soap going. It looked like thick laundry soap. And, of course, very little soap actually ever works in saltwater because of the saltiness problem. And most of us then would work…we'd go someplace, and everybody would say, Hey, they have showers! And everybody would get a shower. Otherwise when it rained, and it rained quite often, we would take a bar of soap and

go get soaped off somewhere, and then dive into the saltwater or whatever, you know. We kept basically clean.

DAITCH: I guess I had this image of you went back to the base somewhere every night, if you went back to Rendova or Tulaghi or someplace like that, that you had showers there.

FROST: Yes, some of the bases had more because they were intended to be there for quite some time. Most of the places we were at only were there as long as the action was in that area. But as soon as they invaded another area farther up, and got that kind of settled down, we moved up.

DAITCH: Really! So they were very temporary places.

FROST: Yes, everything was in tents.

DAITCH: Hmmm.

FROST: We slept sometimes ashore. Again, I can remember at Russell Island, we were able to get some coconut logs. Although it was jungle where we were, we were able to get some logs and sort of make a deck that we could walk on. And we put up a tent on top of this thing. It wasn't a flooring so much because it was rounded edges. But we were able to put cots up there. The interesting part of that, though, it's

you know out here in the jungle, and you can here all these noises and banging. Most of the time it was a little bit scary, but you'd get kind of used to it. It was better than sleeping down below on the boat because it was just too hot to sleep at all on the boat.

So we would sleep in tents, and we would have mosquito netting which was on sticks that kept you from getting too many mosquitoes. Because that was always a problem anyplace that, you know, has mosquitoes. It was interesting, though, that you heard noise that you never heard before. You know clacking sounds, creaking sounds or something. And you keep wondering, what is that? What is that? I remember one night I was in my cot, and I could hear this noise, and I thought, I wonder what that is, you know? You didn't worry about Japanese or anything. You just wondered what these noises were. And I said, Well, I'll surprise this guy or whatever it was. And I had my flashlight with me, and I kept hearing this noise, and it was getting closer and closer. And I'm finally shining my light on, and it was a huge land crab.

DAITCH: Really!

FROST: Right close to my face, you know, sitting on the edge of my cot. Oh, did that scare me! But that was typical, though. You know the things that happened. You laugh about them, but you know, boy, that was scary, though. You wake up and see this huge…. And land crabs are like…they take over shells, a huge shell, conch shell, and they move in. Now as they get bigger, they look for another bigger one, bigger shell, to move into. And some of these big shells that these things move around in. And, of course, they do it all in the middle of the night. During the day they just sleep, I guess. But at

night they look for something to eat or whatever.

DAITCH: Yes.

FROST: But it was an interesting life down there. So a lot of times, though, the officers would hang around together, and they would have their own officers' quarters, so that they didn't stay on board the boat necessarily. And they, you know, they set up a tent, and several officers would be in the same tent and stay there. Because we didn't need to have somebody stay on board with us naturally. I guess they played cards and passed the time away sometimes when they were here.

DAITCH: Right. Tell me a little bit more about what you know about *PT-109*. I mean were you on patrol with *109* ever or on that particular night?

FROST: Yes, yes. *PT-109* originally had been in Squadron 5. And they were operating out of Tulaghi. Now that was at the time when there was a big ship coming down The Slot, and Squadron 5 got right in the middle on

that. And as a result of that, they lost several of their boats and quite a few men, operating off of Guadalcanal and Tulaghi and all the islands right in that area. *109* managed to survive. And when we were further up the line then, we were operating up around Blackett Strait and some of the islands above. And that was when Squadron 5 kind of merged with Squadron 9 because we had lost a couple of boats, and they had lost several of their boats.

So Squadron 5 then started operating with us. Now the numbers started out, you know, *PT-1*, I guess, and worked up. Mine was *161*, my boat. And my squadron was ten boats, really. We had 12 to begin with; two of them went to the Fiji Islands and spent most of the war off in Fiji which is on the way out. And so they never saw much action at all. So we ended up with ten boats then. And then we lost a couple of boats going up on a coral shelf, the coral reefs, I guess you'd call it, and two of them had to be abandoned and left. So then we were kind of hurting to have the number of boats we wanted in our squadron. So then *109* was one of the boats that came and helped out.

And so the night that…. By this time we were operating out of Rendova. And it had got to the point where we would go out every other night so that there would be like two or three different areas that needed to be patrolled because this was where the barge traffic was. And they would assign like three boats to patrol a certain area, three more boats patrol another area, and three more boats in another area. And so you'd have like maybe anywhere from six to nine boats out at one time. Now if you only have like 12 boats in all, you don't have too much room to put too many boats out. *109* was operating with the *157* boat, the *162* boat, and I forget what the other one was. I know *162* was with them that night. This was our night in, the *161* boat. We had been out the night before, and we were scheduled to go out the next night. But we got one night to get some sleep. And so we were in that night. And of course when the boats came back and the word got around…. Because, you know, you come back in, and everybody's anxious and, you know. And pretty soon somebody says, "Did you hear about *109*?" Or, "*109* was blown up." And so there was quite a bit of rumor about it because nobody was actually real close to *109* when it went up.

From what I understand, they had been in an echelon. And so they, the *109,* the only word they got was that there were some destroyers coming down. But I don't

remember that anybody actually knew where the destroyers were going. There are a lot of stories about this as to how that Japanese destroyer got…where it was going and why was it going in that direction and why was it going at that speed? Somebody said it was getting close to daylight. And the Japanese ships were afraid of getting caught down in that area in broad daylight. They needed to get out of there and get away from wherever might catch up with them, you know, the aircraft that were flying patrols around there during the day. So it's hard to say. It's hard to say if they ever saw the *109* there or just by accident hit into her. And the stories are, you know, it's hard to say what is really the truth in that.

There are a lot of people that said, Well, how come…he's on one of the fastest boats around, how come he got run over? Why didn't he get out of the way? It was that sort of thing. And, well, you have to be there to understand that. When the three boats were going in an echelon alongside an island and patrolling, had really no idea as to what was out there that night. They were patrolling with their mufflers closed maybe, which instead of…

I have to explain a little bit. Mufflers are like an automobile engine. And if you didn't have any muffler on there, it's a pretty loud noise that comes out of that pipe, a straight pipe like that. Now we didn't have any mufflers on there, but we did have a type of thing that was like a valve, like a damper on a stove. And if you pulled the levers, those would close that pipe off and force the exhaust then to go under water behind the boat. So this was a bubble boat then…buh-buh-buh-buh-buh, you know, and the engines were going. Now a lot of times we used those, closed them up, because we didn't want the noise to penetrate over to the beaches where the Japanese were; it would give them a key that we were out there or give them a clue of where to fire. Now in other cases now we could not always have three engines on line. Sometimes we would have three engines but two of them just idling and only

one propelling the boat. Because who cares about how fast you're going? We're looking for barges over here. Speed is not one of the things we need.

DAITCH: Right.

FROST: So that one of the problems with these boats was they were not automatic. If you had two engines that were just idling and out of gear…. The gear, you had a reverse gear and ahead gear on these things. And the person that was sitting on top of one of these engines, he was on the right-hand engine, the starboard engine we called it, and he had these gear shifts which he had to push down to put the engines into gear. And if he had three engines, of course, he had to put this gear into gear, and then this into gear, and then he could notify the bridge by what they called an annunciator, that it was okay then. He pushed the annunciator into AAA so he had all three engines could be moved. And it had A, N, and R, I guess it was; Ahead, Reverse, and Neutral. And so the skipper then could look at his little thing up there on the bridge, and it said, AAA, then okay. Then he could push the throttles up. And they were the same type of throttle that you have on a boat that you have down here on the lake. So, you know, you could push the throttle up.

One of the problems sometimes were the guy on the bridge pushed the throttle up to ahead; hopefully the guy down in the engine room was alert, and he's going to push this thing into ahead, you know, push the engine into ahead. And then they could take off. But sometimes the person on the bridge pushed it too fast. Now if he pushed it too fast, what he was doing was just putting the throttle ahead, revving the engine, but the engine wasn't in gear. It was like trying to use your automobile engine, pushing down on the gas pedal, and then pushing the thing

into gear.

DAITCH: Right.

FROST: And it just didn't work. The engine just wouldn't go, you know. So a lot of times…. In this particular case for Kennedy, it's hard to say whether they were idling and only had one engine ahead; two engines then were out of gear. If you saw something coming at you and only had seconds to do something, the chances are you would not be able to put those engines in ahead and move that boat out of there. Or maybe they never saw the boat coming…the ship coming towards them.

DAITCH: Yes, I think…I had read in various places that they saw it coming at the very last moment.

FROST: Yes.

DAITCH: You know you would think…and I mean again this is from a person who has no idea…but you think you would hear something as big as a destroyer coming at you. Don't they make noise?

FROST: Not very much, no.

DAITCH: Really!

[-40-]

FROST: No, because their engine rooms are way down below. They don't have an exhaust pipe. They have a smokestack, but there isn't a great deal of noise that comes out of that because, you know, the type of engines they are. Most of them in those days ran on a steam principle. And I don't know whether the destroyers they had ran on a reciprocating engine like an automobile engine where they had pistons that moved up and down. Or whether you had some sort of a steam turbine. The steam turbine is much the same as…steam going against blades on a turbine and turning this motor or engine; and then, of course, that is transferred to a shaft where they would turn the propeller. But I don't know. I don't think they make that much noise. And if so, if they're coming at you, any noise would be maybe on the other end of the ship. I don't know. But they had no, evidently had, no advance knowledge that this was happening. Otherwise they would have moved out of there. Kennedy, of course, had had a lot of experience with boats. He wasn't any novice when it came to handling a boat. And I'm sure that he would have taken some action if he had been given a chance. He would have taken some action and gotten out of there.

DAITCH: Right.

FROST: PT boats as a general rule didn't stand in the way of anything because they're made of plywood, and they certainly are not going to cause a ship to get hurt very much coming at them.

DAITCH: Right. Maybe you'd just slow down maybe.

[-41-]

FROST: But it was interesting. You know certain things stick out in your mind sometimes, you know, little incidents that happen. I remember we were anchored, you know…. There was a lot of feeling amongst the boats at that time, well, why didn't we do this? Why didn't we do that? Why didn't, you know…? It certainly was quite a revelation when this thing happened and that these people got lost. Well, how come we didn't stick around and see if there was anybody? Ah, nobody could have lived through that. I mean 3,000 gallons of gasoline went up onto the moon, you know. And anybody that could survive through that would…that sort of thing.

And so it was interesting that several days later then, I guess it was what? about ten days, and I remember this dugout canoe coming into our area. Now we didn't see too many natives at all. They were smart enough to keep up in the hills, and they had been able to keep away from the Japanese, and they weren't really that friendly to us up there either. That didn't mean that they would attack us or anything. But they didn't come down and bum food from us or anything like that. We never saw the natives that much. So it was interesting to see a dugout canoe. They had these big long things on the side, you know, to keep it stabilized, and they had a couple of people in this thing. Now from what I understand it was two young people and an older person. And I'm not sure about their ages. But they came into our area, and you say, What are they doing here? I mean we so seldom see these people. And of course it wasn't until later we found out that they had the coconut with them. And of course they were able to read where "There are ten of us." Or whatever the coconut said.

DAITCH: Yes.

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FROST: Now so immediately they took some action then. We've got to go pick them up. And so my boat was one of those. *157* and *161*, and I forget the other boat that went up there to this island where they were. They call the island different names. It's interesting. I think they call it Pudding Island, something like that. I don't remember the name of it, really.

DAITCH: Yes, Plum Pudding or something.

FROST: Well, I saw something else that it was called Wanawana. W-A-N-A. But I don't know where that came from either. It was just a small island where they were. And it was late at night. I think we picked…. We got up there and worked our way in. The two boats…the *157* boat had some I guess people other than the boat operators. Somebody said they had reporters on board. I don't know.

DAITCH: Really!

FROST: That seems strange because I never heard of reporters out there at all. That was a different war and a different time. Nobody ever heard of reporters or knew what they did. But anyway, they had a rubber life raft, and their job was to go in and lower the raft and pick these guys up. Now they had some of the natives with them, this older man that came down with the coconut, with the two younger fellows, with the coconut. They went back on the *157* boat, and they were to guide them into this place.

Now it wasn't that easy because coral reefs out there are quite prominent, and you can't just go anywhere you want. And there are no charts for any of these things at all. Nobody has any idea as to where some of these coral reefs are. So they had quite a job getting there in the middle of the night and not being able to use lights at all. And supposedly this fellow that came down to the base was able to steer them one way or the other and work their way in close enough. And then Kennedy, I guess, fired one shot, and somebody on the boat shot a pistol or something. It was just one shot. And they took a chance on that. So they were picked up. Now we didn't know too much about it except I guess somebody said, "They're all on board. Let's get out of here." It was that sort of thing. And so we turned around and headed back toward Rendova.

DAITCH: So you were basically just support. All of the people were on *157*.

FROST: Yes. We never saw any of the activity. We were just there as support for them. And I don't…I was probably in and out of the engine room during that time. [End of Tape #1] No, we were talking about Kennedy. I never met Kennedy as an officer in those days. If I did, I wouldn't have recognized him. Being enlisted, there was a separation between the officers and the enlisted men. There weren't too many of the enlisted that were friendly with other officers. We were friendly with our own skippers and our own execs. Mr. McElroy [John V. McElroy], who was our skipper in those days, he was a very nice person. Came from a small town in Texas. And he went through college and became an officer. He went through the ROTC, I guess it was. He was a very good person, treated us well. We respected him. And yet it's interesting, you know, because I was like 18,

and he was like 24 or 25. I mean the difference in ages wasn't a great deal.

But that was the old Navy, and officers were respected. I understand it isn't quite the same now as it was then. But the officers were respected. And the executive officer was a fellow by the name of Jackson Litton, and he was from Virginia and came from a very nice family. And he himself was a very nice person. He didn't…. The officers, you know, you got to know your own officers very well. And you knew some of the other officers naturally because the boats all worked together well. The skippers didn't move around a great deal. Once they were on a boat, they stayed on that boat. That was theirs, you know. Well, most of

the time we all got along very well together. I don't recall too much argumentation or fighting or anything like that. I mean you know they talk about the Vietnam, the Band of Brothers. Well, we used to feel that way. We were a Band of Brothers, too, I guess. We didn't use that term. But you did get along.

And it's interesting that we all more or less kept in touch. We still keep in touch with Vic Sherriff; he was the cook. He got out of the Navy and became a postal worker in St. Petersburg, Florida, and we see him every once in a while and call him up maybe at least once a month. Spivey, Louis Spivey was the head motor mech. in those days on the boat. And we got to be very, very good friends. We used to go to Florida on a regular basis; always stopped in to Daytona Beach where Louis lived, and we'd always spend a day or two with the Spiveys. And you know all of these things. We've always kept in touch. And I can't say that I didn't like any of those people. Some of them, of course, were…Joe Tiberti was our gunner's mate. Lived out in California. And he died. We met him a couple of times at our reunions. But he died a long time ago.

A fellow by the name of McWherter ["Porky" McWherter] was our radioman. He was a…I don't

know how he got the name. We used to call him "Porky," Porky McWherter. And he lived in California, Sacramento, California. So we did…I never saw him again after we left the squadron. Somebody said he died quite early in life. A fellow by the name of Eufert. He was the second class motor mech on the boat. And he lived out in California. He came to several of the reunions. The last one he went to was in Boston, and at that time he was very, very ill with cancer and died just within a couple of weeks after reunion. So we've lost all of them. Vic Sherriff, as far as I know, is probably the only survivor of PT boat *161*. And you look around, and, of course, nowadays everybody that was in World War II is over 80. It's quite an interesting thing, when you think about it that the war was that long ago.

DAITCH: Yes. Absolutely. But I think it's interesting, too, that people did keep in touch.

FROST: Yes.

DAITCH: Now it's sort of different maybe. I don't know if it's a more cynical time. But you might think that Kennedy kept in touch with his, you know, with the people that were on his boat just for political reasons because he was a politician, and you could always drag that out and say, Oh, yes. I was in the war, and these are the people that were on my boat. But I don't, from everything that I've read and know about him, there was nothing cynical about it.

FROST: No. It's interesting. Now he…I don't want to go into all of the different things because everybody's read the books on Kennedy and how he reacted to being blown up, and what he did to help his crew, and the things that he did. And that wasn't make believe. These are things that he actually did. And you can't deny him the glory that was his doing these things. And when he was rescued, you would think that he'd normally expect to go home. Most people do. But he didn't. He didn't want to go home. I want to stay out here, you know. And I think everybody agrees that he was in very poor physical condition when he joined the Navy, and was able to get in because of pull from his family or whatever. And so you'd say, well, gee, you know, wouldn't you think that he's done his thing? That now he can go home and become a politician or whatever he wanted. But he wanted to stay out there. So he was able to get on another boat. And PT boats, of course, were speedy little things. And we talked about weight. And if you didn't have any weight on there, you can imagine those things would really travel. Well, I understand that he was able to get onto a boat, and it was called the *59* boat. Now 59, we're talking about boats starting off at 1 and working up. So I was on *161*, which was fairly modern at that time.

Now Kennedy went from the *109* to *59*. The boat itself, the *59*, from what I understand of it, was kind of in bad shape, and so it wasn't going to be used for patrols anymore. So they took off all the armament, and they just made kind of a messenger boat out of it. If they wanted to speed something off and take something somewhere, put it on the *59*, and Kennedy will take it. And so he was quite an interesting character, I guess, doing his thing on his speed boat.

DAITCH: Yes. I can picture him enjoying that. [Laughter]

FROST: Yes. He was a very interesting person if you read about him and the things that he did. I was kind of sorry when he came here to Laconia. I was on recruiting duty at the post office, which is just the next block over. And so I said, gee…. Navy recruiters, of course, are always looking for some way to get their name mentioned and getting U.S. Navy mentioned and, you know, attracting attention sort of thing. So this was a natural to have a politician like Kennedy come into town. So I went over. At that time Earl Anderson, who was one of the guest reporters of the *Manchester Union* had, lived right in town here. And so he said, "Well, now, did you know Kennedy?" And I said, "Well, no, I didn't know him personally. But, you know…." And we went into that. "Oh!" he said. "Come on," he said, "I need to get a picture taken." So that's how that came.

DAITCH: Great!

FROST: It was interesting. And it was interesting in that I recruited Earl Anderson's son into the Navy.

DAITCH: Really!

FROST: So….

MARY [WIFE]: He got the highest score of anybody in New Hampshire, I think.

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FROST: Quite an interesting story anyway about that.

DAITCH: Did you know any of the other people on Kennedy's boat? Because I think about Lenny Thom [Leonard J. Thom] especially because apparently he was quite something, too, the executive officer.

FROST: Yes, I've got a book on Lenny Thom.

DAITCH: Oh, you do?

FROST: We go to these reunions. And of course everybody likes to write a book about their stories if they were there. Because we have a friend that lives down in Alabama, I guess, now. And he was one of the skippers, and he's still going strong. We like to be with him because he's such a nice person. And so we keep kidding him about when are you going to write your book? Well, I'm going to, I'm going to, you know. But he hasn't. I don't think he ever will. But he does have a lot of stories, and he has a good memory of the things that he did. You know it's interesting. When you go to these reunions they have what they call ship's store, and they sell all kinds of hats and T-shirts and jackets, and, oh, it's gone on and on. And then they have all these various movies that are put out. And I have just about all of the movies, I guess, that they had, including the last one which isn't even up yet. It was one….

When we were down in South Carolina this past fall, actually it was in the latter part

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of July, July, I guess it was, the last week of July, we went down there to the reunion. During the time that we were there, they mentioned the fact that they had a television crew from England that was there, and they were going to do a film on PT boats. And so they were looking for somebody then to interview. So they looked around, and there were three of us at our breakfast table the first morning. One of them was the skipper that I was talking about, and then we had the torpedo man from Squadron 9, and myself. So they said, "Would you like to be interviewed for this?" I said, "Yes. It sounds interesting to me." So the three of us did. And there were others, I guess. But we were interviewed for this particular film. So it came out on the History Channel a few weeks ago. And then about a week or so ago, they sent me one of these films from London.

DAITCH: Oh, neat.

FROST: So it was quite interesting. They did a very good job in tying together film clips and past events and so forth to tie it together with the people who were being interviewed. And I thought they did an excellent job on that. It's an interesting one, and I imagine that will be on sale down there. I'd like to make some copies of the one I have. The time it came out on the History Channel, they had called us up from England and said it will be on at seven o'clock on the History Channel under the title of *Heavy Metal*. That was the title, *Heavy Metal: PT Boats in Action*, I think it was. So we were able to make a tape of that on the VCR. So I had that anyway. The one that I got from England, though, was the same thing. But they had omitted the advertising, so….

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DAITCH: That was better.

FROST: Except that they didn't close it up.

DAITCH: Really!

FROST: The gap is still there where the advertising was.

DAITCH: Yes. [Laughter]

FROST: So it was kind of interesting. It stopped and what happened? What happened? Well, 30 seconds go by, and then you get the thing back again.

DAITCH: Right. That's funny.

FROST: But there are some very good films out, though, on PT boats, as well as very good books.

DAITCH: Mmmm hmmm.

FROST: And it was one of those…just one of those things, you know. A lot of the Army and the Marines probably did a great deal more other than what the PT boaters did. But they didn't get the credit, I guess, that the PT boats got.

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DAITCH: Well, the PT boats were very sort of racy, almost fun kind of speed boat things. And they had small, maybe tight-knit crews. You could wrap your mind around that kind of an activity with a single boat or just a couple of boats and, you know, a handful of people on board.

FROST: They were a special type of thing to have a boat that size. Because they were heavy. When you get all the ammunition and the gasoline and all the other things on board, and to get that out, and going as fast they did on water. Because anybody could take the wheel if you wanted to. I mean the quartermaster normally spent quite a bit of time on the wheel or one of the seamen. And they used to…Gee, I wouldn't mind taking over for a while. Oh, yeah. Just keep it on course, you know what I mean. And they'd give you the course then. But it was kind of a fun thing. It was like a…they had a regular wheel like you'd have on like an automobile type of wheel. But it had one of these spinning things, you know. You could take that and just kind of spin that thing and Grrr grrr grrr. [Laughter] You'd get quite thrill with it. And occasionally they had…they'd be in formation, and one of them would say, Well, okay, now let's do this and thus, you know. And you'd cross over the other guy's stern wake, you know. And loop-a-loop, you know.

DAITCH: Bouncing along.

FROST: Yes.

DAITCH: I heard they were brutal, though, as far as bouncing you around. Just a really rough ride.

FROST: Yes, especially in very rough weather. Like any boat, they really would take a beating in rough weather. We went out several times where if you hit a wave wrong, it could break the bottom.

DAITCH: Really!

FROST: Oh, yes. Well, we had some times there. They talked about while they were doing some maneuvers with a battleship somewhere. And so the idea was to see how close we could get to the battleship, you know, to do a run on it. Well, it was very, very rough, and I think of the three boats, all three of them got very badly damaged from the wave action.

DAITCH: Wow!

FROST: You know what I mean, playing around with some battleship; they wanted to do what they could. And even though it was rough water, they did it. But they had some broken ankles, broken legs from hitting the wave wrong.

DAITCH: Wow!

FROST: So there was a lot of damage. And I think, you know, after somebody…I think somebody off the battleship claimed that one man was overboard. So they said, Well, this is not fun anymore. This is dangerous. Let's get out of here. So they stopped.

DAITCH: What made them think that it was a good idea to have a PT boat after a battleship? [Laughter]

FROST: I think it was the speed of the thing, you know. Let's see what we can against a battleship. Well, of course, one of the thoughts was that a battleship's guns can only train down just so low.

DAITCH: Oh, so you get inside the line of where their guns can be.

FROST: Inside to see what you could do with that. You know and it was kind of a fun thing while it lasted. It didn't work out too well. But I can remember one time we were out, and, I don't know, the way the boat came down, but the skipper's name was Davidson. And I remember he broke an ankle during that, coming down. He was standing up on the wheel or somewhere around that area. But it was…they were bad as far as riding them. They were more or less flat-bottomed. And I'll just show you this one here. I'm trying to give you an idea.

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DAITCH: Mary told me I need to go down to Battleship Cove, and she's absolutely right. I have to do that.

MARY: Oh yes, look at the lamp.

DAITCH: Oh, it's beautiful!

MARY: Now that was made down at the place in West Virginia?

FROST: Yes.

DAITCH: Oh, really!

FROST: Fenton, Fenton Glass Company.

DAITCH: That's interesting.

FROST: And the 100th edition; there are only 300. I think it's 300, that's all they made.

DAITCH: That's gorgeous! It's a lamp with a PT boat on the shade just for the tape so that they know what we're talking about. It's beautiful.

[-55-]

FROST: This is a scale here of a PT boat, and this is before radar. Radar came in and was mounted up on that mast. These were twin fifties here, and the twin fifty in this after turret. This was the 20mm Oerlichen gun. And this had a round thing, a cartridge holder. And that held like 60 shells in it, if I remember right. These were a fairly good-sized shell.

DAITCH: And these are the torpedoes?

FROST: These were the torpedoes. Now the thing on the back side of that is where that six-inch shell went in there. And that blasted the torpedo powder that….

DAITCH: Does it literally slide along the deck there, or it comes…?

FROST: No, no. You had to crank that out, and it came out to here. It pointed out in that direction, all four of them.

DAITCH: Okay. Alongside them.

FROST: This is the . . . this line here was the container to hold that thing so that even though you're sticking out over the deck here, it is still held in there so it doesn't foul the lines.

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DAITCH: This looks dangerous to me. You didn't have like rails around the edge of the deck?

FROST: No, no. No, when it got rough weather, we did have some lines. So that if somebody had to drop the anchor or something, that you had some lines for them to hang onto. But otherwise not…very seldom would anybody be up on the bow in rough weather anyway. Most of the time you'd be back over here somewhere. And this was what they called the day room there. It had two bunks in it, and at first it was supposed to be a sort of a place for the crew to relax when they were off duty. But as we added more crew members, that turned into a bunkroom, you might say. So that we had additional room for two more people there. This is the engine room here. This cover lifted up. My job at general quarters a lot of time I was on the 20mm. And one of the reasons behind that was that if anything happened that I was needed in the engine room, then I could get out of that very quickly and down below. These boxes here were for the ammunition for this gun. And they had different places where they stored ammunition.

DAITCH: Now what's this?

FROST: This is the cockpit there. And that had . . . if you went down below that, just halfway down was the chartroom. That had the radio, and it had a big table- like area to put out the charts. Later we had radar, and the radar monitor would be there, too. If you're trying to keep lights from shining out, they didn't have too much light then to see the radio controls and so forth, and you had to be very careful in

opening that hatch so that the light wouldn't come out. This is the air-conditioning, I guess, if you want to call it.

DAITCH: Oh, these are old.

FROST: If you're moving ahead, the wind, of course, would come down through there and force it out. You could turn these around. If you wanted, you could turn these two facing aft, these two facing forward, so that these would blow air down. This would allow the air to come back and go out. But that was about all you could do for trying to control some of the heat in the engine room. So it wasn't very good. This area here is a raised portion. If you needed to change the engine, you could unhook some latches there, and you could lift that whole thing up. And then all your engines are down below, and they could come in with some sort of a hitch and lift the engine right out and put a new one in.

DAITCH: In order to change…. You said that they changed the engines relatively frequently. Would you have to take the whole boat out of the water to do that?

FROST: No, no. You could….

DAITCH: You'd just do this.

FROST: Yes. The only problem with that was if it was bouncing around and they're trying to get this engine out, you didn't have too much room to lift the engine out of that compartment. But normally you might do it if you were in dry dock, for instance. Dry docks are . . . they're tanks, I guess you might want to call it that. And they can raise them up or put water in them and sink them. And so they can put them down. They would have one of these cradles then for the boat, and it could be put into the

cradle when the thing is drained of air and water is filled up, and it sinks. And then they could put the boat in, tie it in. Then they can pump the water out and pump in air, and the whole thing comes up so that they can work on the propellers, the rudders, and so forth.

DAITCH: Mmmm hmmm.

FROST: Because there was a lot of damage sometimes in some areas because these propellers would get banged up, and the shafts would be bent, and they'd have to take those all off and renew them. Coral reefs especially were pretty bad on propellers and rudders.

DAITCH: Did you run close to the coasts on purpose, or is it just that there were so many islands you were kind of always close to the coast?

FROST: Yes, we were always close. We didn't operate too much outside of the sight of land. Everything was fairly close in. You know we worked our way all the way up from Nouméa, New Caledonia, all the way up to the end of the Solomon Islands. We're talking, oh, probably what? 3,000 miles going. But we were all within close proximity to the islands. We never moved too far away from them. Now when we…when I left the first squadron, I left the *161* up in Green Island, and they handed me some papers and said, "Okay, find your way back home." And that was what we did. We hopped flights from here, and then went over to this airport, and see if they've got a flight somewhere else.

DAITCH: Really!

FROST: We ended up in Guadalcanal. And by this time that airport down there had been…it had grown tremendously. And so they said, Well, the best thing to do is to wait it out until we get a transport coming through, and then you can get a ride back. The other way, of course, would be to go over and see if you could get a…hook a ride onto a plane that's going back. But anyway, we said, Well, the faster we get back, the faster we're going to get back out here again. So let's not hurry this process. So we went over and sat in a place called Hotel Degink. And it was a holding place, a holding camp. It was nice, and we didn't have to worry about any action. We could sleep or do whatever we wanted and wait for this transport to come in. Sometimes in the mornings we would get up in time to go up to the Red Cross place, and the women up there would serve us doughnuts and coffee. And it was kind of an interesting recreation place. Eventually we did catch a transport, came back into San Francisco. And at that time we had nothing on but dungarees and old torn clothes. Most of us didn't have anything at all because we weren't in the regular Navy part of it. So we got some money from the supply officer, and went out and bought some new Navy clothes. And then caught a train and came back to Boston.

We were given 30 days leave. And most of us ended up in Boston, for six months we were there. And at the end of six months, right to the very day, I was on my way out to

California again looking for a transport that was going to take me out to the South Pacific again. This time, though, I ended up in New Guinea. And I was on the *252* boat in New Guinea in a different squadron, Squadron 20 by this time. This was a Higgins boat that I was

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on. By this time New Guinea had been all taken. There was no action. We didn't do anything. And so the next move then was to get us to go from New Guinea, a place called Woendi Island, W-O-E-N-D-I; it's a Dutch name. And we moved from Woendi Island, the base there, to Leyte up in the Philippines. This was a very long trip over open water. We only came in through the Peleliu Islands and stayed for a few days until people kind of recovered from the ocean that we had gone through. And it was very rough.

DAITCH: On the PT boat?

FROST: We were all on the PT boat, yes, escorted by a tender. Now a tender is like a mother ship, and they were made to raise boats out of the water. They mostly had some sort of a davit, a derrick, or whatever, that would hook onto a boat and be able to pick it up out of the water if need be. They also supplied us with food supposedly. But it being so rough, it wasn't easy to get the food from the tender to the boat. And I forget how many boats that we had in this convoy going up. But we would have to go, say, for a noon meal or for a supper meal, we would try and get up as close to the stern of the tender as we could. And then in turn would have somebody would throw us a line and hopefully we would catch this what they called tureens. A tureen is like a round pot with a tight cover on it. And they were stuck one on top of each other so you might end up with like four of these pots. And they're all joined with something that clamped them together. So they could take this and kind of dangle it from the stern of the tender.

DAITCH: Wow!

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FROST: And if you were lucky, you ended up with your meal. Sometimes the thing went in the water, sometimes it was just too rough, and they'd, Ah, forget it. And we would eat C-rations or whatever was handy for that time. We carried C-rations with us. But we ended up in Leyte. And at that time there were, oh, hundreds of PT boats there because all our activities had diminished. We didn't have too much to do. They had one island called Palawan, which is the furthest one out into the Chinese Sea. And we were sent over there to help in the invasion of Palawan. So it was quite interesting that we get out there; and when we got to this place where they were going to invade, there wasn't anybody there. Everybody had departed. The Japanese had left a big mess in Palawan. It was kind of an interesting place to collect souvenirs and everything the Japanese had left. But that was all.

But that was the end of the war as far as we were concerned. However, while we were there, they were talking about the invasion of the home island in Japan. And so that was

interesting. We had the charts of Japan and where we might land, where they would land, and what was our job in doing that. Well, if you knew the Japanese and, you know, the fact that they were not going to just give in easily, it was quite a thing to think about. As it turned out, of course, the atomic bombs settled the whole thing. I don't remember too much about it when they declared that they were giving in, you know. They had big demonstrations in New York City and so forth, and everybody was so happy. But we're sitting right there, and what do you do, run around on the base and yell, or what? As far as I know, nobody did anything.

DAITCH: Yes. [Laughter]

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FROST: But by that time I was transferred from that base to another PT boat tender. This was called the *Salinas*, and it was the APG-11. I was put on that to work my way back to San Francisco. And that was where the office…we were supposed to go into San Pedro. But we ran into a typhoon out on the other side of Guam. The ship pretty near sank with that one. Horrible, horrible experience because we were right in the middle of this thing. And it was a huge typhoon. We finally got out of that, and then we had to pull into Guam and got patched up a little bit. Went to Pearl Harbor; stayed about a week or so in Pearl Harbor. And then went through the Panama Canal again and ended up in Brooklyn Navy Yard where I got off.

DAITCH: Where the whole thing started.

FROST: Yes. So that was my experience of the PT boat.

DAITCH: Wow! Did you, you know, after the *109* experience and the rescue and all of that, did you remember people ever like, you know, chatting about what happened to the other guys or what…? You talked a little bit about Kennedy getting reassigned. Did his whole crew get reassigned to the same boat? Or did they end up getting scattered?

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FROST: I think most of them headed back. Some of them were in pretty bad shape. Either they were burned or they had suffered a great deal. And I think most of them were sent back to the States. I don't know what happened to most of them after that. The only one that was a name that sticks out was a fellow by the name of Zinser [Jerry Zinser], Z-I-N-S-E-R. He ended up in Florida. And at one time when we had some sort of a thing at Battleship Cove, he came up and was giving a talk to the group that was there. I felt a little bit sad for him, though, because he was going to make a speech, and we had all the dignitaries, the Kennedys had come in; they flew in with their helicopter and landed over there somewhere. I mean we had dignitaries from everywhere. And poor Zinser got up to give his speech, and he was talking and talking. And they were trying to get him to sit down. And poor Zinser, they might as well have just pulled on him

and took him out of there. But that was the last I heard of Jerry Zinser. And I think he died not too long ago. But he was the only one that I can remember the name of. The others, you know, I might have remembered some time ago, but I don't know.

DAITCH: Yes. I just wondered if there was any scuttlebutt after the whole thing happened about…. Well, I guess you mentioned a little bit about there was this notion that they just blew up and there couldn't possibly have been anything left. I guess that people felt pretty bad about it after they found out there were survivors.

FROST: Yes, yes.

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MARY: Weren't there people on the boat [mumble, mumble…trail off]?

FROST: Yes. But that's all part of the whole thing. There were some unhappy people that felt we should have done more. But we didn't. And you don't know. And being where it was, it was up in the middle of Japanese-held territory, so you couldn't go up there during the day. I don't think anybody, or at least I didn't, think of anybody going up there at night and just looking around.

DAITCH: Right.

FROST: I think everybody just assumed that nobody lived through it. And then on the other hand, hey, we did have aircraft. How come aircraft didn't go up and look around, too? I mean they knew that something had happened, the boat had been sunk, you know. Normally there would be…. Somebody could have done something and didn't.

DAITCH: Right, right.

FROST: You know it's one of those strange things I guess. It's strange that it happened and strange that nobody did more about it than they did. Because there were some, you know, from the crew members that we've talked to, and they say, Well, I was on the…. And they say, We could have, we should have, you know. And that sort of thing. Well, that was many years ago. They didn't do anything at the particular time.

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DAITCH: Right. I wonder if it was partly…you were describing what it was like to be out there; it's pitch black. I don't know that they would have found them even if they'd tried. Not that that's an excuse for not trying. But I wonder if that was part of the rationale.

FROST: We were probably…. Where the boat was sunk, it was probably far enough away that it wouldn't have…maybe a PT boat could turn on a searchlight and look around and see what was there. And it's surprising that somebody didn't, instead of just accepting the fact that nobody could live through that, and, you know, it's just one of those strange things. If you think back to any accident, I guess, you can say, well, why didn't we do something different? And we didn't.

DAITCH: Right.

FROST: But I can't…. You know, so many times, well, Kennedy was at fault. I don't see that. Because there are so many unanswered questions as to the whole thing. But it would seem to me that under the circumstances, you know, this accident happened, and probably they were patrolling on one engine, and one engine in gear. There was no way that they could put that engine in full speed ahead and expect to get out of the way of a destroyer coming at them at 30-some-odd knots.

DAITCH: Right. I guess the criticisms have been what you just addressed, that these are the fastest boats around. Why couldn't they avoid a big destroyer? And the other thing is what we talked about earlier maybe, how could you not hear a destroyer coming at you? But I suppose that sound does not necessarily travel that way.

FROST: Yes. And I don't know that they make a lot of noise moving through the water. Maybe you could hear the sound of waves, the bow waves. You know a bow pushes water, and you'd hear the noise of the water. The engines, not necessarily. If you've got engines going in your own boat, you know, you don't hear everything going on. So, you know, there are a lot of things. I kind of…when I hear criticism, that Kennedy should have been court-martialed or Kennedy should have, you know…. And you say, Well, these are people who weren't there. They have no idea as to what they're talking about. It was not that simple that all he had to do was put this thing in gear and speed away.

DAITCH: Right.

FROST: This is not a racecar by any means. It's an 80-foot boat. And it doesn't go that fast to get out of harm's way.

DAITCH: Well, it's not like a speed boat out on Lake Winnepesaukee where you can give it the gas and it goes.

FROST: Yes.

DAITCH: Not the way you described it. I don't know how much of that was well after the fact, too, and after he was elected to office and so on. Because there was an investigation. Isn't there always an investigation with these things?

FROST: Oh, yes. There certainly was an investigation. Being an enlisted man, I wasn't necessarily involved in any of that. But knowing the skipper that was on my boat, we, you know…. You know after we both retired, he retired as a captain in the Navy. He stayed in the Navy, in the Naval Reserves, so you know…. And I retired 20 years, you know. And yet it was interesting. After you retire, it seems like you drop that officer-enlisted man type of thing. You're just people, you know.

DAITCH: Right.

FROST: And I could talk with him. And I never heard him ever say anything about the fact that Kennedy should have done something that he didn't. And I think most of the people that were there, that were involved in that particular situation, wouldn't criticize Kennedy for what happened. But only respect him for the things that he did do. He didn't just curl up on the beach and wither away. I mean he took some action, did something, to see if he couldn't help get somebody to come get them. Swimming out in the middle of the night in that area isn't something that the average person would do unnecessarily. But he felt that there was a chance that somebody might go by, and that he

might be able to wave this lantern at them, using one of those waterproof lanterns that the Navy has. And it's possible he figured he could use that and signal somebody. But it never happened. We didn't patrol that area evidently. But, you know, all the other things, moving that crew then to another island where they had more food there. And then the natives came by. And taking the chance that they did, you know, to bring those natives in and explain to them who they were and what they were. You have to give a lot of credit to a group of people called the coast watchers. They were quite an experienced bunch of people that did a great deal to help where they could. I don't know if you're familiar with the coast watchers.

DAITCH: I've heard of them, but I'm not sure exactly what their status was, if they were military or civilian.

FROST: I'm not sure whether…I would assume that you might call them in the military of the Australian Army. I don't know that they were given a title such as that, though. And they may have come right from Australia, or they may have been Australians working up in that area. But they did have radios, they did have ways that they could survive. Somebody brought them in. Every once in a while a PT

boat would take them to another island, and they would just disappear. And you didn't know what they did. But they always seemed to keep ahead of the Japanese. And they were able to radio or signal somehow as to what was going on and take some action. If they were way up on the other end, they could see ships coming down and notify somebody down below that, yes, there are three destroyers coming down in your direction. Now they may not know exactly where those destroyers are going, but they notified somebody of something that was coming

up, and that somebody should be on the watch.

DAITCH: So they were in Japanese territory.

FROST: Oh, yes, yes. And they had to move constantly because they never knew what the Japanese were doing. But they were staying clear of the Japanese all the time. Of course the Japanese had full run of the islands there until, you know, something happened and they had to be taken off. But the coast watchers were very important people. It was like having a spy on the backside of your house there, and he's telling everybody else as to what's going on. And the Japanese, of course, if they knew anything about it, and we assume that they knew these people were there, evidently couldn't catch up with them. I never heard about a coast watcher being captured.

DAITCH: You didn't? Yes, that's nice to hear.

FROST: I never heard of that. But there are some books out on the coast watchers. Maybe that's something I should do sometime.

DAITCH: Yes, it's interesting. There was a coast watcher, I want to say his name was Evans [Arthur Reginald Evans] or something like that.

FROST: Yes, yes. That was the man that was involved with Kennedy.

DAITCH: Right. That was mentioned in the story about that. And I guess he had native, you know, people had relationships with some of the natives who helped him. [Change to Side B of Tape] We were talking about Ted Aust [ ] who was on the boat who went to pick up Kennedy, *157*.

FROST: Ted Aust was living in…. When he got out of the Navy, he lived in New Jersey, but liked New Hampshire and bought a farm up in the northern area of New Hampshire. And he and his wife still had that farm when he died. She lives out in Illinois, but she'll be coming back in the summer. She and I started talking after he died. And I felt sorry that I had never visited him while he was still alive, and

I didn't realize that he was going to die unexpectedly like that. I still felt sorry about that. I contacted her and was able to talk with her about Ted. I understand later, though, that they were not living together; they were separated although they weren't divorced. And evidently…I don't know the circumstances, so I don't want to get into that. But I was able to get a newspaper, the *North Country News*, that went into details on Ted and his remembrances of Kennedy and his time on PT boats. So this is an article then that you can have a copy of because I made a copy of that.

DAITCH: Excellent.

FROST: I thought it was interesting. This is a picture of the newspaper. This is a weekly that's put out, and this is up in Bath, New Hampshire. Remember I showed you a picture of it. Well, that's the same….

DAITCH: Oh, nice! Yes, it's the same thing.

FROST: Same thing there. It's quite interesting.

DAITCH: Yes.

FROST: I kept the paper because there, gee, that's the bridge I painted.

DAITCH: Yes! And it's called the *North Country News*.

FROST: Yes. They had a reporter up in Lebanon…wherever. And they in turn did a series of articles on veterans. That one happened to be on Ted Aust, and I thought it was quite interesting.

DAITCH: Absolutely.

FROST: Ted's wife sent me…. She said that in going through Ted's thing, she found a lot of things of PT boats, and this was one of them here that was a whole article that Ted had written. And this was a copy of that article that you have there. And then she sent all these different maps of the islands and so forth. He wrote a letter, and this was the letter, and it's talking about his experiences. He and I don't come to the same conclusions with some of these things. [Laughter] But it's interesting now, an

interesting letter. That's the only thing I have. I didn't make a copy of that. This is what she sent me. But she said she would be around in the summertime, that they were going to keep the farm. They had this. I thought it was kind of interesting. She sent that to me. This is

regarding somebody who was looking to write a book evidently, and wanted information from Ted. Evidently the people in Memphis had given him this name. And this fellow contacted Ted then. And I'm not sure whether this letter is from that. His request was: Please send me all your different things. It could be that Ted wrote this in reply. I'm not sure. It was kind of interesting, though.

DAITCH: Yes, it is interesting.

FROST: But I got wrapped up in Ted's death, and that was a strange thing because supposedly he was living by himself and had a pretty good life. He was involved in VFW or organizations such as that. And the reporter said that he had gone down to do something at city hall or some such thing, and somehow got lost. Ended up in a small area of Vermont. His car was parked on a logging road. Some people in a hunting camp noticed the car had been there for several days. So eventually somebody went down and looked in, and there was Ted's body. He had been dead all that time. And he was parked on a logging road over in Vermont, now quite a long ways from his house. So if you wonder if maybe he had some problems, mental problems. How could he get lost and not know where he was having lived in this area for 40 years, it would seem like it would be pretty hard to get lost.

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DAITCH: Right, right. Or maybe he wasn't lost. Maybe he was just trying to get somewhere and had a heart attack or something. That seems weird.

FROST: Well, you know, so I don't know. There were a lot of questions then. That's where the story ended, and I said that's too bad in a way because I had done a lot of work calling this fellow, and he's talking with him and so forth.

DAITCH: Yes. Well, it's very interesting. I would love to have a copy of that letter if…

FROST: If you wanted to make some copies and just mail them back to me, that would be fine.

DAITCH: I can do better actually, I can give them to _____ and get copies.

FROST: I just thought you'd be interested in that. Because I'm not sure if the Library has that sort of information from somebody that was on that boat.

DAITCH: That's right. I'll bet you they don't. Because again, I'm pretty sure that no one has interviewed him, and unless they would have gotten a hold of some letter like this, which I doubt…. So this would be the kind of thing that I know they'll like to have.

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FROST: Now, I have a letter I wrote in reply to a fellow who was a PT boat modeler. Now what this means is that people are interested in a boat or ship or whatever and try to make a model of it like that. And so they will get the specs, the layout of the boat and so forth, and it's all done to scale. And they do this by hand. And so this fellow, Alex [Alex Johnson], I can't remember his last name, Alex, anyway, is the modeler. And so…Alex Johnson. Now Alex Johnson asked me…we met at one of the reunions…and he asked me if I would answer some questions. Now for some reason I don't have his letter asking me…describing the questions. But I answered him and sent this along. Now I just made a copy of this today because I've got it on the computer. But this is…it starts off with me being born in Hollis, New Hampshire, and takes me all the way back to the end where we're married and living happily, you know, that sort of thing. But it's kind of an interesting…it's sort of an autobiographical sketch of me and what I did in the Navy. The question wasn't in big form about Kennedy. I just mentioned that Kennedy was there and something about that.

DAITCH: Yes. Now this is wonderful. This can go with…. What'll happen with the interview is we'll have it transcribed. And then I'll get it, and I'll edit it but I don't do a lot of editing. I'll edit out this part, for example, probably. But I'll do some light editing because it's a good interview and your thoughts are organized, and it flows right along. I don't usually edit very heavily anyway because I like to keep things in somebody's words as they tell me. And then we'll send you a copy. And if there's something you want to edit or add before it goes permanently into the Library records….

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FROST: That'll be fine. I'd like that.

DAITCH: Yes. And they'll ask you for…what they call a deed, so that you've given the Library permission to let people see it; and you can give restricted permission or you can just make it fully available to whoever wants to see it, however you want to do it. So that's what'll happen with that. Do we have more papers?

FROST: No. Just that picture of Kennedy I have. But I guess I gave you….

DAITCH: I think it was on one of these.

FROST: Yes, that one, it should be in there.

DAITCH: Yes.

FROST: Okay. So that's the tie-in with Kennedy and me. So you wouldn't need that anyway. Now that you know me and what we've got and so forth, you know, feel free. Give me a call anytime.

DAITCH: Oh, thank you. I may do that. Because as I go through things to try to figure out what makes sense and what kinds of questions to ask…. You've actually been my first PT boat interview, so it's very helpful to get a lot of background information about what the boats were doing and what they were about.

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MARY: You've got to go to Battleship Cove.

DAITCH: And I do have to go to Battleship Cove. I really want to do that. [Break] Thank you so much. Alright. ______. [Sounds like Vicki is getting ready to leave; conversation impossible to follow.] We do try to come…. Usually the family traces the same weekend as the _____. But that's like one day. So usually what we do is do the family trace and come down and watch for the next day or two. So maybe we'll bump into you there, too. Anyway, it was good seeing you guys.

MARY: ______.

DAITCH: Oh, I will, I promise. And I will be in touch. Okay. Thank you. They're in my pocket, thank you. Bye-bye. [End of Tape #2]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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