

**Transcription: L. D. Cox**

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*Hi, this is James Crabtree with the Voices of Veterans Program. Is this Mr. Cox?*

**L. D. Cox:** Yes.

*Yes sir, how are you today?*

**L. D. Cox:** All right.

*Good, are you ready to do our 2 o'clock interview?*

**L. D. Cox:** Oh yeah.

*Great.*

**L. D. Cox:** You had told me 4:00, but I'm glad you're early.

*OK, yeah, no I thought we'd said 2:00, but either way -*

**L. D. Cox:** It doesn't matter. I'm ready anytime.

*All right sir, well joining us today also listening in is Mark Loefler, and he's my boss. He's the Director of Communications for the Land Office, and he's on the headphones so he can hear what we're saying, then when he has some questions, I'm just gonna hand the phone over to him so he can ask you if that's OK -*

**L. D. Cox:** You bet.

*All right. Well let me start off with the first part which is the time date stamp. This is so future historians and generations know when this interview was done. Today is Friday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2008. My name is James Crabtree, and I'll be interviewing Mr. L.D. Cox. This interview is taking place by phone and I'm at 1700 North Congress Avenue at the General Land Office headquarters in Austin, Texas, and Mr. Cox is at his home in Comanche, Texas, and this interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. So now that we've got that set, sir, I guess the first question I want to ask you is a little bit about your boyhood, your background, and maybe tell us a little bit about your family.*

**L. D. Cox:** Yeah, I, I was born and raised on a livestock at Sidney, Texas, a mile out of Sidney, S-I-D-N-E-Y. I was born in the ranch house, not a hospital, and I grew up on the ranch farm, and attended Sidney schools, and then later on went to college at Tarlton, well it was called John Tarlton Agricultural College. It was a two-year college at the time. Now it's Tarlton State. And then after my service, I went to A&M, well I went back to Tarlton and got my certificate degree there at Tarlton and then I went on to A&M and got my BS in agricultural education.

*Yes sir. Can you tell us a little bit about your parents or any siblings if you had any?*

**L. D. Cox:** Yes, I had two sisters. One was named Lavera. She was eight years older than I was, and the other one was named Nellon, and she was four years older than I, and they've both passed away now and so has my mother and father. And I married a girl in Comanche, Texas. Her name is Sara, Sara Lou McCarrell, and we have one son. We named him the same as my name except spelled it different.

*And I was gonna ask you that sir, what your initials stand for?*

**L. D. Cox:** My initials stand for Loel Dene Cox.

*How do you spell that first name?*

**L. D. Cox:** It's L-O-E-L, capital D-E-N-E.

*Oh OK.*

**L. D. Cox:** I kid people and say I'm part French, it's Loel Dené. My son, we spelled his name the regular spelling, Lowell, capital D-e-a-n, Cox II. And he goes by Dean usually.

*Yes sir. Where was Sidney in relation to Comanche and when did you move to Comanche?*

**L. D. Cox:** Sidney is about 9 or 10 miles northwest of Comanche.

*OK, so it was always pretty close.*

**L. D. Cox:** It's always close, yes, and it was, at one time when I was born, it was a pretty thriving community and I'm talking about it had a gin and it had three or four stores, or more than that, and a couple of three gas stations and a post office and a barber shop, and in fact, the barber shop, I got my first store bought haircut. My dad cut my hair until I was 10, and I got my first store bought haircut at this little barber shop that's still standing in Comanche. It's pretty well dilapidated, but it's still standing. And Sidney was like I say, a thriving community, and what we were all proud of and have been for years, there's a hill there that kind of drops off into Jimmy's Creek Valley, kind of and where the school was, and the three that on the hill there at the end of Sidney was three churches – The Church of Christ on the south, The Methodist Church in the middle, and the Baptist church on the north part of the hill. All that one after another, real close.

*And so did you, you knew your wife then while you were in high school?*

**L. D. Cox:** No, no, I didn't know her until I got back from the Navy.

*Oh wow, OK.*

**L. D. Cox:** And my cousin, Jack Farrell, introduced me. I went on a blind date right after I got back out of the Navy and she was my, my date and so we ended up, she went to Mare Hardin Baylor for two or three years and I went on to A&M and then after I finished A&M, why I had me a, I had me a job before I ever finished A&M, and what I did, I took two summer schools, got out a semester early, and my first job was teaching agriculture at San Angelo Junior College, San Angelo. And taught out there a couple of years and then I came back to Comanche County and taught a couple of years at Augustine, and then I got with a feed concern called Moorman

Manufacturing Company out of Quincy, Illinois, and I stayed with them 31-1/2 years and was, well I went from a salesman in Comanche County to district manager in south Texas, San Antonio area, and then state sales manager for Texas and New Mexico for 30 years.

*Wow, that's pretty good.*

**L. D. Cox:** And in the meantime or while I was doing all that working for the feed company, I bought some land and I'm on the place where I was born and raised, and another ranch out south of town a couple of miles, a little over 800 acres total.

*Yeah, that's just a little spread.*

**L. D. Cox:** And then I've got, I've been a director in the Comanche National Bank for 42 years. I'm proud of that.

*Oh you should be, definitely. Well sir, let me ask you. You grew up in Sidney. Did you go, was your high school in Sidney or did you go to high school in Comanche?*

**L. D. Cox:** No, high school was Sidney.

*In Sidney. And I guess you must've been a school boy then was Pearl Harbor was bombed. Do you have any memories of that time?*

**L. D. Cox:** Yes, when Pearl Harbor was bombed, I was visiting in Marlin, Texas, and I can remember very well when that, I heard about that. I don't remember very much detail, other than the fact that I, you know, I heard about it, and –

*Did you follow the war closely while you were in high school?*

**L. D. Cox:** Well yes, of course everybody did then. Back then, especially when we entered the war, why then we began to have sugar rationing and tire rationing and gasoline rationing and all of that, and I was trying to court my girlfriend in Comanche, and so we'd have to double up every time on the gasoline of the car. We'd double date all the time of course. And it made our dating kind of far between, once every week or two weeks that we could get enough gasoline to get 'em and take to the picture show.

*How long was it after you graduated high school before you went in the Navy?*

**L. D. Cox:** Well I had, I had three semesters at Tarlton, and I volunteered for the Navy. I wasn't any hero. I figured I'd be drafted, but somebody said it'll be, why did you join the Navy, an old farm ranch kid like you? And I said well, and this is the truth, I saw posters, billboards that said join the Navy and see the world, and then I saw another one that said a girl in every port, and I thought that's for me.

*So can you tell us what your family thought when you told 'em you had signed up?*

**L. D. Cox:** Well, they expected it, I mean it, I was on summer vacation. I took the summer off and was, when I got the greetings letter, I was hoeing peanuts in the field. We raised peanuts back then and have for years, but and we had just about every kind of livestock that you could think of. I grew up with more chores than I could get done every afternoon after I got in from

school. We had turkeys. We had chickens. We had eggs. We had two milk cows to milk, and just other chores to do, and so I didn't have any trouble staying out of trouble.

*Tell me after you decided to sign up, did you go to was it like a Navy recruiting officer there near Tarlton?*

**L. D. Cox:** No, I went to the county courthouse here in Comanche. They had a recruiting office there. And then when my, they called me, when the time came, why I had, I took my first train ride at midnight. I boarded a train here in Comanche at midnight and went to Dallas to the center where they were signing everybody up and giving them physicals, induction center.

*And where did you go from Dallas, where did you do your basic training?*

**L. D. Cox:** San Diego. Rode a train all the way from Dallas to San Diego and back then, their main Country entertainment was Dominoes in '42, and I found an old boy from Weatherford that was several years older than I was, and he could really play '42. In fact, he and I got to be partners playing '42 all the way from Dallas to San Diego, to boot camp, and we were, we were champions on the train.

*And then once you got to San Diego, how long did you spend in your basic training?*

**L. D. Cox:** Oh, seems like it was two months, maybe a little longer.

*And then from there I guess you were immediately assigned to the Indianapolis?*

**L. D. Cox:** Yes, uh, they asked me where I would like to be, CB's or sea duty and I put CB's. I thought I'd fit in there better, and of course you know where I went, directly aboard ship.

*Tell us a little bit about the first time you went aboard the Indianapolis, kind of what it was like being a sailor for the first time on a ship that had already seen combat.*

**L. D. Cox:** Well of course what, what really amazed me was the size of it. It was a heavy cruiser, and it was a beautiful ship. It had the clipper bow on it, which is the only one in the fleet that did, and the size, it carried right at 1,200 men, personnel, and I never had been on a ship like that. I'd been in a few boats, but I didn't know much about sailing.

*When you came aboard the first time, were you with another group of sailors that were also new to the ship, or was it just yourself?*

**L. D. Cox:** Yes, yes. There were several of us. I don't remember how many but probably 30 or so. Anyway, went aboard ship. They put me in the biggest division that they had, which was the 7<sup>th</sup> Division, and there was around 70 men, and it was a deck division. Of course some of the toughest, roughest men aboard ship was the boatswain mates and the deck gang, and we did our share immediately of chipping paint, repainting, chipping paint some more. It usually the paint would dry before we had to chip it again! But and then of course got in on mess hall duty. But one of the things that I really, really started me off not, not too well, they didn't have a bunk for me, so I had to swing a hammock in the mess hall, and every night I'd roll up my clothes and dungarees and all and swing my hammock right there in the mess hall, and of course all night long, sailors were coming down having coffee, and one night I forgot to take my billfold out of my pocket and put it in my pillow slip. That's the way I always did. The next morning I

couldn't find my pants, my shirt, or my billfold. And finally I found my shirt and pants but no billfold, and it had, it had pictures and addresses and things like that that was, you know, what I really treasured and a little bit of money.

*Never found out who took it?*

**L. D. Cox:** Never found out anything about it. So that kind of gave me a bad taste. But anyway, I later on when Okinawa, we got hit the suicide plane, why I got to transfer in to the smallest division, which was NAN division, the navigation division. It had about 15 or 18 in it, and I stood watch on the bridge and steered the ship and times were better. I mean I enjoyed that more. But oh, we, we left right out of San Francisco and headed for the Pacific, and it wasn't long after we got there, we went on the first carrier raid against Tokyo.

*OK, I've read about that.*

**L. D. Cox:** And it was kind of exciting. They had decided – when I first went on 40 millimeters for a week or two and they decided to put me on horizon forward to lookout for my general quarters, which was the crow's nest, highest man on aboard the ship. And I was supposed to see something before anybody else saw it.

*I guess you weren't afraid of heights?*

**L. D. Cox:** No, I wasn't afraid of heights, and there was one time that when we were just not in battle, but about to be, I sighted a ship before our radar caught it, and got a well done from the captain, and when you get a well done from the captain, that's about as high as you gonna get. But I did see a vessel that it was one of ours it turned out to be, but anyway when we hit Tokyo, started bombing, it was overcast, it was really foggy. You couldn't see any distance. You couldn't even see the top of the mast from the main deck hardly, and I was as we were letting our airplanes go in to bomb, we had two or three carriers right around us, and I was on duty, and I heard this engine, this motor astern, and I looked back and there was one of our own airplanes coming in lower than I was, and it was, it saw that the, well we were right behind an aircraft carrier, and it was too low and tried to pull up, but hung it's landing gear on our antenna and mast, and tore off part of his landing gear and put steel and antenna all around me where I was on the horizon forward lookout post, and then it flew on and tried to land on the carrier, and with my binoculars I could see that it turned upside down, and so that was a little exciting. And then I saw my first Japanese up close. We took aboard 10 prisoners that we'd sunk a little ship, and they came aboard and we put 'em in our brig, and then after we had that skirmish, why we headed for Iwo Jima, and our ship was the flagship of the 5<sup>th</sup> fleet. We carried Admiral Spruance. And he was the command, we were the command vessel there at Iwo Jima, and in fact, I've been honored to by the Nimitz Museum to come down and be on a panel of four on Iwo Jima in September the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>. It's called the Closing of the Circle, and it's about the Philippine invasion and Iwo Jima invasions. And so it was, things picked up considerably. We were, well I saw two of our, of our heavy, larger carriers on fire, burn, and burning. I don't remember whether it was the Franklin or the, I don't remember the name of the carriers, but we were right close to them, and then we went on in to Iwo Jima and shelled and shelled for several days, and we were right there next to the island whenever the Marines came, came aboard the Iwo Jima, when they landed. And you, we had a ringside seat. Of course we were shelling the caves and the beaches and the admiral thought he needed to be up close to the island so we could see, and we were within 50-caliber machine gun range a few times of Iwo Jima, and oh, I saw, I've never seen the amount of rockets and planes and bombing and all on an island. There's

wasn't, it didn't look anything could be alive. And come to find out, there wasn't, we didn't kill hardly anybody. They were all in caves.

*Did you see the flag raising on Mt. Suribachi?*

**L. D. Cox:** Yes, I sure did, and all the whistles and the horns of the ships and the yelling and all that went on, I always tell the audience, particularly the school kids that I talk with, there wouldn't be any burning of our flag and tearing it up if they had been there and seen the flag go up and felt your scalp tingle and your tears come and see what a glorious thing we were fighting for.

*Absolutely.*

**L. D. Cox:** And it just, it just tears me up whenever somebody disrespects the flag because that is, that's what our country stands for, and if somebody doesn't honor that, they need to leave the country is the way I look at it.

*Oh, I agree. I was gonna ask you sir, with that flag raising, do you know if you saw the first one or if you saw the latter one, that Joe Rosenthal took the photograph of?*

**L. D. Cox:** We were aware of the first one. It was a very small flag. And then of course the second that went up was Joe Rosenthal, the flag, and that was one I think that, well it got the publicity, and of course I've had the, the honor of hearing James Bradley, one of the flag raiser's son of course that wrote *Flags of Our Fathers*, and meeting some of them and hearing them talk and it's, you know, you probably know more about it than I do, but Joe didn't even know where he got that shot of that flag raising. And two weeks later after he got back aboard ship or back to Hawaii, wherever he was, somebody asked him if that was the picture was and it had been out on all of the magazines, you know, and they asked if it was posed, and he said yes. And then when he saw the picture, he was so surprised because he had just took a snapshot as it was going up, he just twirled and saw it and took a shot, and didn't even know that, for sure that he got it, and of course it turned out to be the most publicized picture in all the world of the war, and uh, it was, it was great. And it's, the flag is, it's dear to my heart, and I don't claim to be any more patriotic than a lot of people, but I sure, I resent anybody desecrating our flag.

*I was gonna ask you sir, when you were on the ship as a sailor, what did you know about kind of the scheme of maneuver or where you might be going to next, or was it just kind of a situation where they told you OK, this is where we are now?*

**L. D. Cox:** It was the latter. I didn't know where we were going most of the time, or a little before we got there, you know, at the destination I would know, but I wasn't privy to any of the inside movements of the ship or anything, but I did get to, I did get to fraternize with the captain and the admiral on every day nearly, and I can remember seeing Admiral Spruance stroll the deck and his bald head shining, walking. He always took his daily walks, and he, he was of course replaced Nimitz, and from the story I got was that whenever Nimitz retired, they came to Spruance and Spruance said give, give the command to Bull Halsey. He would be better stated, if he don't get it, and he would be a good one. But of course they didn't give it to Bull Halsey, they gave it to Spruance, and a wise move because I think if you knew your interviews taken on all the admirals, why I think Spruance was probably the most deserving.

*Can you remember any of the conversations that you might have had with Admiral Spruance?*

**L. D. Cox:** No, not offhand. He was always pleasant and would speak and all, and he was very nice to the crew. One of our boys, a friend of mine was fishing one time we were docked and fishing, and he was walking, he was fishing kind of where Spruance was walking, and he was told to reel in and get off, you know, quit fishing. And Spruance told him, leave him alone, he wasn't hurting anything, and he just let him go ahead and fish. So that's kind of the way that I knew Spruance. And another thing, we saw lots of brass. We had Nimitz come aboard with, in fact, at one time at Ulysses, when we were preparing for the invasion of Iwo Jima, the biggest fleet that ever assembled was there, and one day I counted over, well, I counted 70 stars of admirals. But somebody said they counted 57. And anyway, you never saw the like of brass that came aboard at one, on one ship in a day.

*Do you think that changed things for you and the crew? Do you feel like perhaps things were more restricted or more uptight because there was such a presence of brass all the time?*

**L. D. Cox:** Oh yeah, there's no question about it. I'll tell you a little instance that happened to me on the bridge. After this was after I got to be in the NAN division, I was standing watch on the bridge and the captain walks over to me and he says Cox, when did you have a haircut? Well it had only been less than a week, and I told him. And he said somebody go, he designated a person, go below and bring up the barber. He didn't shave my temple even with the top of my ears. I had a close haircut but I had just a slight sideburn, and boy I'm telling you, you ought to see the rest of the time I was aboard, I looked, my, I had no sideburns. They were cut off even with the top of my ear. But that shows you the strictness that they had on our vessel. You didn't mess around and slouch around and grow whiskers and all of that. We were, we were a tight run ship.

*And what do you think the relationship was like between the ship's captain and Admiral Spruance?*

**L. D. Cox:** Very, very close, very close. They were always together and very cordial. I never heard or saw any, anything happen that I thought was any agitation and one of the things that I remember, when we were anchored at the Ulysses, whenever all the admirals were coming board, why I was on watch on the horizon forward lookout at that time. I hadn't switched stations. And I was standing up on the horizon forward lookout platform and up comes a commander of a British, England commander, and he was aboard with an admiral from Britain, and he came on up to my station, this commander did, and he asked to use my binoculars, and he viewed the fleet and he said quite some fleet, eh, what? And I said yes sir, it's quite some fleet. And then and we stayed there, I don't remember whether it was a week or longer, but we had, we had liberty of a little island they called Mog Mog Island, and it was about the size of a postage stamp, but it, you could get off and stand on land at least and it had a few coconut trees and –

*And it was called Mog Mog?*

**L. D. Cox:** Mog – M-O-G, M-O-G. Mog Mog Island.

*Do you have any idea where that might have been?*

**L. D. Cox:** It was in the Ulysses group of islands, at Ulysses, and I don't know, of course, which island or what, but it, anyway we weren't far from it on our ship and that was where they designated three beers to the man that we could drink. Well, I didn't drink beer. I went all the

way through the Navy and Texas A&M and Tarlton and never had a beer or drank or a cigarette, and I'm proud of that and still am.

*Did you sell your beers, or - ?*

**L. D. Cox:** I didn't sell it, I gave it away and I had friends, you never saw so many friends, at least for that day I had friends. Every time they had beer call, I had friends.

*At that point, how long do you think you'd been aboard ship when they gave you that liberty?*

**L. D. Cox:** Well, let's see. That was, I was only on the island, was, I was on Hawaii once or maybe twice, and then Mog Mog, and that's, that's the only time I remember getting off ship and this was, I went on I guess in, I went on the same time Captain McVeigh went aboard ship. He took command same time as I went aboard, which was probably maybe November and this was -

*November of '44?*

**L. D. Cox:** Yeah, and then this was '45 just before Iwo Jima in February, 1<sup>st</sup> of February.

*So at least several months you had not even been on land.*

**L. D. Cox:** Yeah, mm-hmm. And we, you know, we got, we got liberty and I did get off and go and walk on the island, and you know, you know of the Navy swagger, when you see an old soldier, a salt walking, he's got a swagger, and that's not put on. When you are aboard ship for any length of time, you walk straddle legged. You've got to balance yourself, and you get to where that you can run up a ladder and never touch the hand railings and you can come down 'em without touching the hand railings, and you can walk without falling down, but you have to be aboard for a while to get into the, to the groove so to speak.

*What was an average day at sea like for you when you weren't in combat? Did – were you able to get enough sleep or enough meals?*

**L. D. Cox:** The food they said was good. I didn't particularly like anything but the pastries, bread and the cookies and all, and it wasn't bad food, but funny thing about it, I always when we'd have Spam, I just loved it, and I know that all the GI's had Spam every day and they hated it. But I did like Spam and the SOS on a shingle, you know, that they served wasn't too hot in the morning, but all in all, couldn't complain much about the food, and it – we had, that's one reason I joined the Navy. I wanted a meal every day, and so we had three meals a day, nearly all the time. Sometimes we, it wasn't during battle well we took a sandwich or it wasn't just exactly on schedule.

*How long was it that you had to sleep on a cot in the mess hall before you got a bunk?*

**L. D. Cox:** Oh, a week or 10 days.

*Oh, OK.*

**L. D. Cox:** It wasn't a cot, well it was a hammock.

*Yeah, I mean that's what I mean, a hammock, yeah.*

**L. D. Cox:** Strung a hammock and then whenever they did find a bunk, I was the fourth man up right under a big, big hot water line that was wrapped in asbestos, and I had to keep my bunk covered with a plastic sheet every day because when they'd fire the heavy guns, that asbestos would just fall all over the bunk. It's a wonder I don't have methio – what is it?

*Mesothelioma.*

**L. D. Cox:** Yeah, mesothelioma. And I do have a little problem with my lungs, but I don't have cancer at least.

*Well that's good. You mentioned you'd come aboard right around the time Captain McVeigh did. Maybe share with us some of your first impressions of the captain when you first saw him.*

**L. D. Cox:** Well I was scared to death. I was scared of anybody that had, had a cap on with scrambled eggs, and I just, I did what I was told to do primarily, and had very little conversation unless I was talked to, and I just looked up to 'em as my superiors and they most of 'em were real nice. Some of the boatswain mates, they had to show their authority, you know, rough, tough, and their language was about as sorry as you could get, but that's what, I thought that was the Navy way and I guess it was.

*Did the chiefs pretty much in your estimation kind of run the ship?*

**L. D. Cox:** I saw more of the other people than I did the chiefs. The chiefs, they, I just don't recall seeing too many chiefs aboard our ship. Most of 'em were all the way up in first class, boatswain mates and all that, but we had chiefs, but they as far as over me, just seamen, well I didn't get too much contact.

*I guess we'll go from Iwo Jima – I know you while you were on the ship saw a lot of action and you were aboard during Okinawa, is that right?*

**L. D. Cox:** Yes, one little thing that happened that while at Iwo Jima, we, we were getting flack from our own airplanes, we were getting empty shells from the airplanes that machine gunned the island and shooting the island falling aboard our ship, and of course we got a little flack maybe from the shore batteries, but we never were hit directly or anything, and they had told us we had a head, you know, that's a latrine, Army lingo, had a head right in front of the rear 8-inch mount that was on the stern. We had two mounts forward, 8-inch with three guns to each turret and then this turret was on the stern, was right next to the head. We were told not to use that head during battle, and I didn't understand why, and nobody said, and so I got to where I needed to go to the bathroom, and so I just ducked in there. I was off of duty, standing on the deck and I was there close, and I just ducked in there and used the head, and at the time I went in, the guns, all three of the 8 inches were pointed broadside toward the island we were shelling. Well while I was in the head, our ship turns toward the island and the 8-inch gun swung forward, and I started, when I left the head, I stuck one leg out and just as I hit the entrance, the door, that opening of the head, all three of those 8 inches went off and blew my rear back plum back into some, the head, and I couldn't hear for three days, and that's the last time I used that head. I understand why they told us not to. But that was, that was just a little something that happened, instances like that happened all the time, little things aboard ship you remember.

*One thing I read is that when you were at Okinawa, you guys were hit by a kamikaze – could you tell us a little bit about your memories of that?*

**L. D. Cox:** Yes, at that time I was still horizon forward lookout in the deck division. We hit Okinawa and we were shelling the islands, and we had shot down about five kamikaze's and been lucky, and they'd be filling the, the sky, these airplanes, and so the morning before the invasion to take place, I was down in the mess hall having breakfast, and just had my tray, just started to eat and about that time over the loudspeaker came a voice very excited, man your battle stations, all hands, man your battle stations. We were on a semi-alert at the time. We had men of course at the stations, but we weren't in full battle station command alert, but anyway, I just dropped my tray on, put it on the table and headed up the ladder and then headed forward, and it was, I ran through the hangar deck. We carried two airplanes, observation planes on catapults, and I headed and I hit midships running forward and I saw this out of the corner of my eye, I saw this airplane, and it looked like he was gonna hit me, and it was coming in just a-screaming and about the time I hit the quarter deck, why bam, that plane hit us on the port side toward the stern, and it went through the delayed action bomb, one of the bombs that the plane had went through nine decks. It went through every deck on the ship and exploded underneath the ship, knocked off two propellers and blew that ship up high enough to where whenever it settled back, the water flushed over the deck on the stern, and it's 22 feet to waterline. It was, it threw me up in the air and I landed on my stomach and I looked up and there, one of the airplanes is falling off the hangar, or the catapult, and there was a sailor that was on the airplane, it threw him down and he hit the deck not far from me, and then I had turned around about twice and headed where I was supposed to go to the lookout position for general quarters, and it, it went, the bomb went through the mess hall and hit a table and went through the table, the mess hall table, and on through the decks and exploded and flooded a couple of three compartments or so, and it hit, it hit where the NAN Division, navigation division boys' compartment was, and it killed nine men and wounded 26, the bomb did. And after I got off of my watch, I went back to where the plane had hit, and they immediately pushed the plane overboard and I looked around and most of the wreckage was already knocked off into the water, but I found a little piece of aluminum airplane wing that I picked up and put in my locker, brought it home, and put it down in the cellar whenever I had liberty, and later on our home burned, it burned all my memorabilia up except I had that little piece of airplane wing down in the cellar. You know, back then every farm has to nearly have the cellar, and then I donated that piece of wing to the Nimitz Museum and they are now displaying it at the Bush gallery at the Okinawa displays just before you get out, after you make your trip through the display, well they have the Okinawa displays and under glass they have that little piece of aluminum. And by the way, history mysteries, they called me a year or so ago and I went down to the museum and met with them and we had a program about that piece of airplane wing or little piece of aluminum, and they still show it every now and then under unsolved mysteries or history mysteries or some of that.

*Yeah, I was able to find a 10-minute clip of that on the Internet the other day and watched it. One question I have was what was it you think that made you want to pick up that piece and save it? Was there something special about it or did you think you want it for posterity?*

**L. D. Cox:** Well I just thought it was pretty cool to have something Japanese, you know. I never did get a chance to get any souvenirs hardly, and I just saw that and it wasn't very big and I just picked it up and put it in the locker and thinking it'd be a souvenir and it was and is.

*That's amazing. Now after the attack had taken place, how long was it before you were able to find out about your fellow crew mates that had been killed or wounded?*

**L. D. Cox:** Well immediately they shut the sound and dog-eared the compartments and in fact I'm sure that there may be some that they caught down there that would maybe have made it out, but whenever you get hit and you've got water coming in the compartments, you have to, you have to save the ship and the majority of the crew by dog-earing it, dogging the hatches, and they slam those things shut and immediately why we knew that we had lost some life and then we had wounded men, and we could still steam with the starboard two – we had four propellers – and we could still steam and had power, so we went to a little old Suicide Harbor, we called it Suicide Harbor – it was in a little inlet where when the ship would get hit, they would carry it to this little inlet, and we went to that Suicide Harbor and spent probably five days to a week or so getting a concrete bottom put in, and we held, we held our services for the boys out at sea, buried 'em at sea, and maybe one or two was taken off and possibly buried on one of the islands, but I think if it was, they brought 'em home, and then those we buried at sea of course. We draped the flag over 'em and tilted the plank and gave 'em a sea burial. But one of the things that happened, we were just in that little inlet getting repaired, and we got word the Japanese were swimming out climbing up anchor chains and with grenades and killing sailors on the ships that were in there, and one night I was down in my compartment and directly it said that all men remain in your compartments – there is a Jap aboard, there is a Jap aboard. Well of course we stayed in the compartments and the next morning when I went on duty, why a Marine had been knocked out and hit in the head and but they never found the Japanese, and somebody decided it must've been a sailor that was mad at a Marine. Anyway from that time on, we had a patrol boat every night around our ship patrolling round and round and round our ship, and then when we got a bottom put in, why there's 15 ships, us and some tankers and three destroyers headed for the states to get repaired, and of course they'd already invaded the next day after we got hit, and but we slipped out away from the islands and made it back and right after we left, right after we left Okinawa, they drew my name which was usually pretty regular for mess duty. You know the letter C, they go from A, B, C on getting their mess duty all the time, and I never could figure why they didn't start at the bottom and go the other way. But anyway my name came up and I was down washing pans with steel wool down in the mess hall, I mean in the galley, and down the ladder comes an officer and comes to me and he says Cox, he says, I see you have a little college, and I said yes sir. He said we need some men, a man or two in NAN Division to replace those that were killed. How would you like to transfer? Well, I said I would like that, sir. He said drop that pan and follow me. I dropped it right on that steel deck and he went up the ladder and I was right behind him a-licking his boots every step he made. I was glad to get out of that galley. And from then on my days were much more enjoyable because I got to be around the captain and the admiral and some of them on the bridge, you know, and my duties were steering the ship – I was helmsman. And then I sometimes took the earphones that led one to the engine room and then another \_\_\_ earphones on the lookout.

*When you guys went back to, I think was it Mare Island you went back to to be repaired?*

**L. D. Cox:** Yes.

*What did you do during that time while the ship was being repaired?*

**L. D. Cox:** Well they gave us liberty. I think it was three weeks. Anyway it was a nice, long liberty and I just really, I just really enjoyed the trip and the time off, and getting to come home and see everybody and my folks, and so, another little sidelight that was interesting – I went back to the ship and it was, wasn't ready, it wasn't fully repaired, and so my folks decided they'd come to California. Well back then, that was quite a trip aboard train, and folks got aboard the

train. We had a peach and a fruit orchard. We had 400 peach trees and plum trees and all, and so my dad, if you want to really get into work, have you an orchard and the way we handpicked all the fruit and then we had a wagon and team of course and we put the fruit in bushel baskets and aboard the wagon, and the field was a sandy field and so my dad and mother on this train, it was just hard seats, wooden seats, no padding, and they got in and seemed like they said maybe it was New Mexico, and the porter said would you folks like a better seat? The trains were always full, and he said I'll save you a seat that had pad, padding and all. And boy, the porter came back and got dad and mother and took 'em up there and dad reached in his pocket and pulled out a quarter and gave the porter a quarter, and the porter said just a quarter? And dad said if he had to carry a bush of peaches on his belly across the field and got 25 cents a bushel for 'em he thought that was a pretty good deal.

*Did you first go back home to Texas before they came out to see you?*

**L. D. Cox:** The way I remember, yes, and then after I went back to the ship, they came and saw me before we, four or five days before we took off and really we were supposed to, we were supposed to have a couple of months in dry dock, maybe six, maybe ten weeks in dry dock and then shell the coast, gunnery practice along our west coast, and what happened was they finished that ship repair and overhauled it two weeks early, and so just as we left out of Mare Island, they took us over to San Francisco to Hunter's Point and put on this, we loaded on this big wooden crate, and it was under Marine guard, and of course we wondered why we were taking a crate aboard to have gunnery practice, and it, they took the crate aboard and put it on the quarter deck and I leaned up against it – they had a Marine friend of mine was guarding it, and we took off and instead of gunnery practice, we went under the Golden Gate Bridge, and right after we did that, we hit flank speed 32 knots and headed out to the Pacific. Well, you know how a scuttle butt is, wondered, they said what in the world have we got in this box that's so important, and the best scuttle butt was that it was a big box of scented toilet paper for General Douglas MacArthur. And if you knew MacArthur back then, you knew if that's what he wanted, that's what he got, so it turned out not quite to be the toilet paper though. We took it to Tenyen, dropped it off there and the \_\_\_\_ finished the trip with a little boy over to Hiroshima.

*Do you remember what it was like when you dropped it off at Tenyen, were you met by - ?*

**L. D. Cox:** We were, we were just anchored out there and then a boat came out and we transferred the box over, crate over and it was tedious to do. We had a big crane come in and to get it through the superstructure and lower it. They put a big old net, a rope, you know, a lanyard net and put it on that, and they got it up just about as high as they were going with it and started to move it across to the boat and the net slipped about two feet and that thing started dropping, it said whoop, and everybody held their breath and it caught again, and so we knew they'd lost little boy in the brink, is what we nearly did.

*How long was it afterwards that you found out exactly what it was you were carrying?*

**L. D. Cox:** We were, I was in the hospital on the island of Samora after the sinking, and been in there seemed like five days or say, whenever the nurse came in with a picture on the newspaper and said gentlemen, this is what your ship was carrying, and it was a picture of the explosion of Hiroshima bomb, and that's when we knew what was in the box.

*What was your gut reaction when you were told that?*

**L. D. Cox:** Well, we knew the war wouldn't be longer, we didn't think it would be, last much longer, and of course we were overjoyed that we'd have an end to the war and we were also overjoyed that our boat or our ship was commissioned to carry the bomb over that we dropped.

*Amazing. Do you think that Captain McVeigh knew what the contents were of that box?*

**L. D. Cox:** You know, I never did know, and I don't, I really don't think he knew. I think what he did know was it was very, I think he knew it would end the war quicker, and I'm sure he had an idea. Whether he was actually told, I don't know, but what I heard later a few years ago, didn't know at the time, but I was told that they didn't even know that that bomb would work until we were already under the Golden Gate Bridge and right after we went under the bridge, they detonated in New Mexico the bomb trial, so that's how fast that they got, in fact it was transported before they actually knew they had the final test. That was my understanding.

*That's amazing. Another question we wanted to know is did the secrecy of the mission, because it was so secret, did everything change in terms of what you were doing on the deck, or was it pretty much normal routine?*

**L. D. Cox:** It was normal routine. It just everything was, our speed was, you know, tremendous. We were one of the fastest ships in the fleet and I don't know whether you know it or not, but that ship, the Indianapolis, was commissioned in 1932, and it became the ship of state for Franklin Delanor Roosevelt, the president, and he traveled aboard our ship for several cruises and after, when the war started, they took the ship and tried to make it a war ship. The main difference was it was, wasn't, the steel was quite a bit thinner on the decks and it wasn't the heavy steel like they later put on carriers and all. It had the speed and the looks and all, but it didn't have the armament, and we, our main guns were the 8 inches, nine of them. And we had six or more 10-inch guns, and then we had lots of 40 millimeter and 20 millimeters. That was their arsenal.

*How maneuverable was the Indianapolis, especially when you were on the helm?*

**L. D. Cox:** Very, very subtle, and I, one little thing that happened right, oh the day after we left with the bomb aboard, I was in the mess hall, and all of a sudden it just lifted to the starboard and threw everything on the deck. I heard it threw the captain's radio on the deck, just dishes out of the chief's quarters, and everything just, I mean, went to the starboard side. And I heard that the captain immediately contacted the bridge and wanted to know what happened. And the officer of the deck gave an excuse of an unusual wave or something of that nature, and when I got back on duty on the bridge, I found out what really happened. We took on a new sailor, a new recruit that came on board, and he was at the helm, and the officer of the deck gave him a change of course, a slight change of course, and an inexperienced – they're supposed to give it by degrees rudder – well evidently the officer of the deck didn't give him a degree rudder and he just swung it around there about a 3- or 5-degree rudder, like you would if you was driving 15 knots, and he took on water on the starboard side and nearly, he nearly turned that thing plum over. And that was just one of the things that happened, and of course we had gunnery practice every day nearly. They had to have an airplane pulling oh, a pattern of sleeve they called 'em, and you'd shoot at the sleeve behind the airplane. But we, we made, well we still hold the record of speed record between the United States and Guam – nine steaming days. It's still a record. There's no other ship, vessel, that beat that.

*When you were at sea, how much if any contact did you have with your family back home or news from back home or how \_\_\_\_\_ was going?*

**L. D. Cox:** My mother was real good. She wrote me nearly every day and I always got mail when mail call came, and the letter, delivered mail was any way they could. I've seen fighter planes throw mail on their bow. Of course that was admiral, very important messages. And then I saw a B-24 come across our stern with a wire and a hook to drop mail, and we strung a wire on the stern, and he would come across – well this happened one time that I remember – came across and he wasn't, his hook was standing straight out, his wire off of the airplane and he didn't hook us. So he made another pass. This time he got so low, his hook hung the superstructure. It jerked that, the mail out, scattered it all over the ocean, but they were, the two or three mail bags floated and we, we put out a boat and got all the mail back. But something like that all the time, some kind of excitement.

*Sir, do you need to take a quick break? We can always do that –*

**L. D. Cox:** Why don't I take a glass of water.

*Well let me just pause it and when you're ready, just come on back to the phone and we'll keep going.*

*All right, we'll go ahead and return the recorder back on here. So we got to the point where the bomb had been delivered to Tenyen, and then I believe I read somewhere that you went to Guam after that, is that correct?*

**L. D. Cox:** Yes, I went in, I was in bad shape when they rescued me and I stayed in the hospital longer than some. I lost all my hair on my, my hair on my body slicked off just like a peeled onion. I mean no hair at all.

*What I meant sir was after you went to Guam, before you were sunk, or am I mistaken? I thought I'd read somewhere that some members of the crew had left the ship.*

**L. D. Cox:** Oh, OK, we haven't got that far along. OK. After we delivered the bomb to Tenyen, we went back to Guam, which is only 40 miles or 70, I don't know, short little trip, and took on supplies, and at that time, why the captain requested an escort vessel. We had no sonar and they turned him down, and said there wasn't one available, but assured us that our route was safe enough. And so we took off from Guam by ourselves and eventually, I believe the second night out, I had midnight watch duty and I went up on the bridge at 12:00, and been on watch about oh, 10 or 15 minutes, and whoom – up in the air I went on the bridge, and came down on my stomach and then I started to get up and I got to my knees and looked up and there was fire and debris, water way all above the bridge, and the bridge was 81 feet from the water line. So it was a tremendous explosion. And then about the time I got to my knees to get up, another explosion came and threw me up in the air again, and then I got up and of course nobody knew what had happened, and about that time, the captain appeared on the bridge. He was staying, sleeping in a little cubicle right off the bridge, and he was in his pajamas. It had blown him out of his bunk, and he of course was wondering what had happened and nobody knew. The officer of the deck didn't know, anybody else of course, they didn't know what had happened. We were by ourselves out there and out in the just midway between the Philippines and Guam, and here we were at midnight with these explosions, and immediately we began to list to the starboard, and the captain gave orders for the engineer, fire control officer to check below and see what the

damage was, and we had no power. I was supposed to be on the phones to the engine room that watch, and there was no power anywhere – lookouts, engine room, or anything else – but the ship was still under power. We were still moving. And so of course what we were doing, we found out later after everybody got together that the first torpedo had knocked off about 60 feet of our bow and the second torpedo hit midships and the, in the ammunition part, and blew a hole in the ship and we were taking on millions of gallons of water, and we were still going forward, and we couldn't get any word to the engine room to cut power. So we were just filling up, and that's why we sunk in 12 minutes from the time we were hit. The captain, the fire control officer came back three or four minutes later and said captain, I can't reach the engine room, there's fire all below. And the captain told him to try again, and we were on a list, holding on by then to anything we could get a hold of, and the fire control officer came back and said sir, we're sinking, we're gonna have to abandon ship. And so the captain, well, the officer of the deck said this was during the 12 minutes of the first part, the captain changed and put on his clothes, pants and shirt, and the officer of the deck said somebody get the captain a life preserver, and well, I knew where they were and they were hanging on a line not far off the bridge, so I got a couple of 'em. I got him one and me one, and he got his life preserver on and I got a kick out of I told some of my neighbors this story, and whenever the Mission of the Shark with Stacy Keech came out in a movie several years ago, it didn't show the captain with a life preserver on. And they said hey, I thought you said he had a life preserver, and I said he did have a life preserver. They screwed up on the movie. But anyway, he said follow me down and we just barely could get down the ladder and we got to the second deck down, one deck above the main deck, and he said pass the word to abandon ship, and everybody went to hollering, abandon ship, and whenever he said that, that's when I left him. I thought that's what he meant was to abandon ship. So I pulled and worked my way to the top side or the port side, which was the high side of the ship, intending to jump off because it was about to roll. The ship was just already down into the water, part of the quarter deck was under water laying on the side, and I didn't want to get under that superstructure, and I wanted to be away from that ship because we'd been told how suction pulls you down. Well I worked, I tell, I told some of them that I had, I had read stories about the captain going down with his ship and I didn't want any part of that, so I left him, and I went up and started to jump off on the port side, and I couldn't because it was on such a list that I couldn't go over the main deck. It was leaning so, listing. So there was a hook, a steel hook that had been holding oh, a gaff or something, and I grabbed that steel hook and swung as far out as I could, just swung and released and I missed the first deck and hit the hull and then bounced into the water, and went under and came up and my first thought was I lost my cap, my Navy cap, and the next thought was that I had swallowed about half the ocean and the oil that was in it and the stink and all, and I began to swim away from the ship for about 50 yards and I turned and looked back, and when I did, there was the ship already going down and about half of it was down, the bow had already gone down, and the stern was headed straight down, and the two, the fore propellers were still turning, and the ship, you could see the shipmates still jumping off of that ship, and the odd thing or the sad thing is, and it was on one of the magazines, said the moon sunk the Indianapolis, and actually in a way it did. We were in dark, dark night with heavy clouds, and the captain when he retired about 9:30 or so, 10:00, he left word with the officer of the deck if there was any changes, to notify him. Well just before we were sunk, the clouds began to break and the moon was bright and it came through the clouds and still lots of clouds, and when a cloud comes in front of the moon, it's still dark as everything, but when the submarine, I-58 commanded by Hashimoto, was still, he was surfaced and he saw the ship into the moonlight, and he said that it was just a speck on the horizon and he dived immediately and through his periscope he could tell it was a big ship, so it was coming his direction, so he just prepared to fire his torpedoes, and anyway, whenever you could see, like I say, you could see the ship, you could see the, see whenever the clouds were rolled back, but then when it would, a

cloud would come over, you could hardly see your hand in front of your face. Well the ship went down, I saw it go down and the billions of bubbles came up, you know how the ocean is, the phosphorous and all with the bubbles coming up you can see all that, and I felt in my groin, I felt some like an explosion or something. I figured it was the boilers exploding. Anyway, it was a force hard enough you could feel in your groin, and I swam a little more and I came upon a lone sailor that was in a life preserver, and swam up to him and he had been burned, flash burned, and the flesh was just hanging from his cheeks, and he, I said something to him, and he said something to me, and he said is that you, Cox? And I said yeah, is that you, Josey? It was Clifford Josey, a friend of mine from oh, around Hiko area that I knew well, I knew aboard the ship, and he said I'm hurt bad, and I could tell of course that he was, and he didn't last very long. And then I was by myself and I, I began to try to hear or see or something, anybody. I didn't know how many got off or whatever, and I swam a little and I heard some voices and some screams and all and I swam toward the voices, and came upon a little group of about 30 sailors, and that's where I stayed, tried to stay within the group for the next four and a half days and five nights.

*With Josey, did you leave him, did you try to take him with you, or - ?*

**L. D. Cox:** Oh no, he wasn't in any shape, he died.

*Going back to before you guys were hit, you know, it kind of became a controversial thing later where the Navy had said that the captain had not zig-zagged like he should have. Was that something that you guys had done, or was that anything you were familiar with?*

**L. D. Cox:** Zig-zagging back in that day and time had been really useless on the modern torpedoes, the modern submarines that Japan had, they didn't really consider it much of a defense, and it was left to the discretion of the captain, and our captain, when he retired, why it was so dark you couldn't see anything, and we were traveling 15 to 17 knots, and a submarine, unless you just run onto him, they're not gonna chase you. They don't have that kind of speed back then. And so he just gave orders, you know, for straight course, but he did tell the officer of the deck, any changes, notify me. Well I don't know whether the officer was just a little late or I don't know how long the moon had been coming through, not very long, but anyway, what happened was, we were still on a straight course, but the, the submarine Commander Hashimoto said it would have made no difference at all about the sinking and he showed how that he fired six torpedoes at different intervals, a few second intervals, and he got us with two of 'em.

*Once you were with those other 30 men in the water, what was it that was said, somebody immediately take charge of the group, or did – what was going through your mind at that point?*

**L. D. Cox:** Well, we had two officers in the group, but the communication of course, everybody's main thing was did we get off an SOS? Nobody knew. The next thing was, we're gonna, we're due in port in a couple of days, we've got to last that long and then they'll look for us. Neither one, come to find out we did get off an SOS, we learned that after years of the Navy's claiming we didn't, and I talked to the guy that was on the radio on the Philippines that took the message. He wrote a letter saying he got a message and he went to the commanding officer with it, and the commanding officer he said smelled of alcohol. It was of course midnight, and the officer was just retiring or maybe he was already asleep. Anyway the officer told him if there's any further messages, come in to notify him. Well of course there wasn't any more messages. And therefore he didn't get, he didn't do anything. Then whenever it came time for us to join the Idaho in gunnery practice which we were practicing for the invasion of Japan

mainland, we got there and they said garbled messages, they didn't understand that we were supposed to join 'em at that certain date and they, they just paid no attention when we didn't show up, and then they wiped us completely off the chart. It's a wonder that they ever knew we were sunk at all, even now, the way that as many foul-ups as the Navy had, and it was just pure accident that we were seen.

*Tell us a little more if you could, sir, about that first night in the water, maybe kind of what the conversation was like with the other men.*

**L. D. Cox:** Well, some of the men, some of the men just had blow-up, we all were supposed to have folded life preservers, rubber life preservers around our waist. Most of the men did when they went on watch, and there was a few in the crowd that had those blow-up preservers, and then most of 'em had the regular Mae West or K-Pock jackets. We went through the first night with conversations ranging from was there any islands out here, where are we, you know, and all that, and then some time the next morning, why one of my buddies said take your shoes off, Cox, you're kicking me. I still had my shoes on. So I took my shoes off, so whenever I was swimming around amongst the guys, I wouldn't kick 'em with my shoes. Then probably the second or third day, there was a couple of officers that knew me, and they said Cox, they came over to me and said you're gonna be our guide. There is an island, a secret island out here, and it's only for officers, but if you're our guide, an enlisted man, I'm sure they'll let you come aboard the island. Well we three took off swimming, and after about 100 yards away from the little group, I stopped and told 'em, I said sir, I don't know where I'm going and I don't think ya'll know, I'd like to think we ought to all return to the group. And they said well, we know there's an island here. You can return to the group, but we're going on. And they never were seen or heard of anymore.

*Do you think they'd just become delusional at that point?*

**L. D. Cox:** Oh sure, that's what was happened, they'd become delusional. A lot of the guys did. I'm sure I did, too at times, but there was one time that one night, I don't remember whether it was the second or third night, why one of the guys yelled everybody be quiet. There is a submarine below us. And of course I didn't think there was a submarine below us. But he said I have a walkie talkie and radio here and they are gonna surface and let us come aboard. Well, I didn't believe that either. But when you're out there, you never, you don't know whether you're the one that's losing it or somebody else.

*Now you guys all, were you covered in oil?*

**L. D. Cox:** Oh yeah, yeah, everybody was covered, just thick oil because it was just all, all over the sea.

*Were you wounded at this point?*

**L. D. Cox:** I had one scratch on my thumb, a pretty deep cut that where I came off and had grabbed the hook. There was a piece of little scrap metal on that hook and it dug into my hand, my thumb, and I still got a scar where it did, but that was the only injury I had, and so anyway this radio man, we were all quiet and he said I'm in contact, it's one of our subs. They're gonna surface and pick us up. The only thing is there anybody in the group that urinates in the bed at night? And one old boy said I do. And he said well you can't come aboard because they don't

allow men that do that on board submarines, and that's pathetic, but it happened, and that's I remember very well.

*The entire time you were out there, did you ever come across any of the other survivors, or were they just so far –*

**L. D. Cox:** Oh yeah, you'd see, oh every day you'd see a lone survivor by himself a-floating, and some of us swimming, and we'd holler ahoy there, have you seen land? And come join us, and he'd just swim on, and then one of 'em said oh, I just came from an island. It's just a little further up ahead. And men were going out of their heads. I had one of my buddies take his life preserver off and dive down for a drink of water. All of our water was on the second deck, drinking water, and he dived down and came back up and told us how sweet and good the water was, how cool and nice and we got the preserver and put it back on him and all, and it wasn't a very few minutes his tongue began to swell. He couldn't breathe, he choked up. He died. Brown foam comes out the nose and he just strangles and that salt water will kill you.

*When was the, because I know a lot of people know a lot about the Indianapolis because of the movie Jaws and the shark attacks, do you remember the first shark that you saw?*

**L. D. Cox:** First day after daylight. We had 'em every day, and you could see, you could see from a half a dozen or more fins circling, you could look down underneath you for 20 feet down, you could see 'em circling down underneath where you were, and all different sizes. In fact, one buddy not over three feet from me, a shark came up from the depths and took him and covered me with water and down he went, and we didn't see him anymore. A big, big shark and it just took him off, and you'd hear somebody scream or you'd see blood on the water, you'd see something every day where a shark had hit somebody.

*Do you remember what the fins looked like because I know there's been, I guess some people through the years -*

**L. D. Cox:** Just like it does in the movies. You'd see about looked like a foot or so of the fin on top of the water swimming.

*Yeah. I've read where some people have said that it was the oceanic white tip sharks. Do you think that's pretty much accurate?*

**L. D. Cox:** I think we had several different kinds. I think we had probably half a dozen different kinds of sharks – tiger sharks and great whites, they were very aggressive. And it was a feeding ground. We had enough dead sailors floating around. They both, finally they would take them, I think but they'd take a live one, too.

*Do you think you had a dozen different types of sharks because when you saw 'em they looked different than other breeds of sharks?*

**L. D. Cox:** I didn't pay any attention about what kind they were. I knew there were several different kinds of sharks, but they looked kind of bluish to me, and big, and vicious, and would like lightning they could come up, and I was scared, and I had a buddy that is a survivor and he said if you wasn't scared, you wasn't there, and that's the way I feel about it. I only know one man in our organization that claims he wasn't scared when he was out there of sharks. But I think he was dreaming. I think he's dreaming now.

*Yeah, after the first shark attack, what did you, did you guys try to do anything as a group to try to, I think I'd read that you guys would try to band together.*

**L. D. Cox:** Yeah, we'd try to stay together and kick our feet, and yelling. We tried everything we could think of to do, and I still don't know what was the best – I do think that staying in a group is kind of like a covey of quail. I think it'll confuse the predator, the shark enough to maybe he don't attack or will attack one on the edge or something.

*And during that time, I'm sure time just blended together for you, but were you ever able to take turns at all trying to sleep or did you just pass out?*

**L. D. Cox:** Every man was on his own. By that I mean after the first day, the second at the most, there was very little talking going on. Your tongue was swelled up, you were dry, your mouth was so dry you couldn't talk, you couldn't breath hardly and you'd take water in your mouth and spit it out, water in your mouth and you was getting water in your nostrils, and every day your life preserver was getting lower in the water, getting waterlogged, and you couldn't hold your head up. The first two days, you could lean your head back and if the sea was calm, you could get a few naps of sleep, but as time wore on, you couldn't, you couldn't get any sleep and you were just groggy and just trying to keep your nose out of the water and you were trying to stay together and that's about all you were doing.

*When you were out there maybe more early on when guys were talking, were there any in the group that were religious that were praying at any point?*

**L. D. Cox:** I think every man prayed out there. I don't know, maybe once or twice they tried to organize a prayer or something, but I think if a man had any sense of religion that he prayed and I still do.

*Did at any point while you were out there, did you ever feel like you lost hope or just thought that you were never gonna be found?*

**L. D. Cox:** I always felt that if there's two picked up, I'd be one of 'em because I was 19 years old, I was in good condition, in fact I was number one in the endurance boot camp endurance test at the end of boot camp, why I ranked number one in the company of the endurance, and I thought I could be there as long as anybody, and I wasn't a good swimmer, but my health was perfect and I had taken care of myself and I believed in the Lord. And I had fear of dying, I don't mean that, but it was a lot easier to die than it was to keep fighting afloat, and we had a lot of boys just gave up. They just wore out and couldn't fight it and they maybe went out of their head, and so that's just the way it was. There the last night if there was any doubts, it came up because the jacket was so waterlogged, that you couldn't keep your head up out of the water, but the last night just before dark in late evening, we heard this motor, and we had seen airplanes every day fly over.

*Oh, I didn't know that.*

**L. D. Cox:** Yeah. But they were real high and of course they weren't looking for us. We could see them and we wondered why they couldn't see us, but when you're flying two miles high and looking down on the ocean, you see 20 square miles, a head looks like a pinpoint if you can see it at all, and so nobody saw us. But we heard this motor, airplane motor, and looked back kind of

into the west and there was a PBY flying slow and low. Well we screamed and kicked and yelled, and then it just went on out of sight and never did see us. Well, we thought that's it. That's as close as anybody will find us. Well, it wasn't, it seemed like a day, but probably half an hour or so, we heard a motor again, and it was either that plane or another one, low and flying a different direction. Well, we screamed and kicked and waved and everything and it just kept a-going. Didn't see us. Well, our hopes were dwindling. We figured that was as close as anybody would come to seeing us. And just before dark, heard the motor again, looked back in the sky and about a half a mile off, this PBY changed course and flew right over us, and you could see an old boy in the hatch a-waving to us, and that's whenever my hair stood on end, that's whenever I had cold chills and tears started flowing. We knew we'd been seen and so it got dark and then looked up in the sky and there was, well we thought it was an angel. There was a big, bright light coming out of one of the clouds. And actually what it was was a flood light from one of the ships flashing a big flood light up into the heavens to let us know that a rescue was coming. And it did save a few lives because some of the guys had given up hope saw the light and they began to kind of rouse up and wait. Well, I went to sleep I guess because I don't remember anything after dark much until a strong arm was pulling me into a little boat and a bright light was in my eyes. And they were about to pull my arm off it felt like. They got me aboard this little ship, a little boat, LCZP landing craft, and took us over to the Bassett. It was a converted destroyer escort, the Bassett was, and it ended up picking up more survivors than any ship out there. We had seven rescue vessels. The Bassett picked up 152 or 156. Anyway well they took us over and it was night of course. They had flood lights around the ship and trying to get us aboard. They had a rope ladder and they tied a rope around my arms and we call 'em manyards in the Navy of course, and started up the ladder. Got up, with some help got up on the board deck, and I thought I could walk and I took one step and fell on my face on the deck, and the sailors picked me up and carried me to a bunk and one of the bunks, it was canvas-bottomed bunk instead of springs, and they rolled me onto it, and they rolled me on with my hands under me, and when I woke up, I don't know how many hours later, my hands were stuck to the canvas and it nearly pulled the skin off. And I rolled over and then a couple of the crew of the Bassett picked me up and took me to the shower and started trying to get some oil and salt water off of me. They brought me a change of clothing, and they rolled and put me back into the bunk and gave me juice and then the next thing I knew I went, I was asleep. You know I was just exhausted. We got into the island of Samora in the Philippines and went to the hospital there, the Navy hospital. And they cut off all my clothes, wrapped me in gauze and then I had, they took tweezers and they took skin, dead skin off of both shoulders as big as the palm of your hand, and there were sores all over the legs and the bodies and all, and big old blue burns, phosphorous burned stuff, and they wrapped me in, they changed wrapping three times a day the first two days. I smelled like a dead horse. And it, well I was pickled. All the hair came off my body like a peeled onion. And my fingernails and toe nails came off and I was dead, I had died I guess, my body.

*How long was it after you were rescued before your family was alerted that you were OK, or did they even know that you were missing?*

**L. D. Cox:** They didn't know and they didn't get a telegram. I think it was the day they announced the end of the war, and they got a telegram saying that I was wounded, and didn't say where, when or how. See, the Navy withheld the sinking of the Indianapolis, and announced it the same day as VJ Day, and it took little bitty, a little bitty bylines on the newspaper and the end of the war took the main headings.

*What was your feeling about the court marshal of Captain McVeigh?*

**L. D. Cox:** They called me twice. I went to Washington twice on the trial. I thought it was nonsense, still do. I think it was a railroad job. I think the Navy had to blame somebody, a scapegoat, and they took the captain, and it was a shame and a crime that they did. Even Hashimoto, the commander of the submarine, wrote a letter to Congress trying to help exonerate the captain, and in his letter he said that he didn't think the captain should have been court marshaled and he didn't think Japan would court marshal one of their men.

*When was the first time the survivors got together for a meeting or a gathering?*

**L. D. Cox:** I think it was 19 and 60, or '66, I don't remember, I believe it was '60.

*Did you happen to have a chance to attend that?*

**L. D. Cox:** Excuse me.

*If you want, we can take another break if you need to.*

**L. D. Cox:** Gotta get a drink of water.

*Sure. Not a problem. I'm gonna ask you just a couple of more questions and then I'm gonna turn you over to Mark Loeffler who is our Communications Director because he's been listening to all this and he has a few questions to ask you as well, but yeah, I'd asked about the first time the group had gotten together and I found a little clip on the Internet from 1960 when the captain had spoken to your group, and I was wondering if you were at that -*

**L. D. Cox:** Yes, I only missed two reunions during the years, and we used to meet once every five years there in Indianapolis, and the captain, I understand that he was reluctant at first to come, but he was thrilled to death. We all met him and with arms open and it thrilled him that we, you know, didn't blame him. There's not one sailor ever blamed the captain.

*And of your group, how many survivors are still taking part, I mean just off the top of your head?*

**L. D. Cox:** Well, I just came a month ago on the 30<sup>th</sup> of July of this year, I, we had a little reunion there in Indianapolis, and we had had one the year before, so this was unusual, but we had another one and there was about 20 survivors and their families and friends that made the reunion. We had a great reunion about four or five days there in Indianapolis, and it's my understanding that there's somewhere around 64 still alive.

*Wow.*

**L. D. Cox:** Most of 'em are in wheelchairs, on crutches, in nursing homes, whatever, because I'm one of the youngest men aboard and I'm 82.

*Well we really appreciate you taking the time to tell this story to us because it's an amazing story and it's heroic what you went through and the fact that you're willing to talk to us so openly about it, I think is really amazing, and it's just a wealth of information. What I'm going to do now sir is I'm going to hand the phone over to Mark Loeffler and let him ask you some questions and I'm going to listen in on the headphones like he's been doing. So here he is. Thanks.*

**L. D. Cox:** Thank you.

*Hi, Mr. Cox, this is Mark Loeffler.*

**L. D. Cox:** Hello Mark.

*How are you doing?*

**L. D. Cox:** All right.

*Are you doing all right? I know this is a long interview for you.*

**L. D. Cox:** Well, that's all right. I don't mind talking about the Indianapolis because it's still dear to my heart and the men are still like shipmates and buddies to me.

*Well that actually leads me to my first question is in doing research, I've come across several interviews and I know you participated I think in the Discovery Channel specials that they've done, things like that, why do you do it? Why do you want to continue to tell this story?*

**L. D. Cox:** Well, I think what has happened, the first 20 years after the, after the end of the war, a lot of our next door neighbors didn't know I was on the Indianapolis, and if they did, they didn't understand what the ship had done or anything. It wasn't talked about much by the service by World War II men. I figured that I went through a lot, but I didn't have to go far to see a buddy that went through worse or just as bad, so we didn't do much talking about it, and I think that was a big, big, big mistake that us WWII veterans made. We didn't tell the horrors of war. We didn't impress upon the youngsters the good things that came from the war like unity. Our country was never more unified. Everybody worked. The housewives worked. Farmers, ranchers, everybody did their part, and people don't realize that, and they had sacrifices here. You couldn't buy a tire. You couldn't buy sugar, you couldn't do a lot of things and everything was rationed and they made do. They put patches on their tires and then they'd put another patch on top of that. And so the history books, I was told that there's more about Marilyn Monroe than there was about World War II, and that is a crying shame. That's where we let our youth down, and I have talked to lots and lots of youngsters in the different schools and different organizations and I've talked to A&M ROTC group and community college in Lakehill and various other colleges, and it's what happened in, on my case was we of the Indianapolis survivors, we wanted to exonerate our captain. We felt like he got a raw deal and we felt like our ship was, had a stigma that shouldn't be there, and so we begin to try to get him exonerated, and so we had to talk about it. We had to get petitions and we had to get to the public any way we could, and we weren't doing a very good job until finally this young boy, Hunter Scott from Florida, at 11 years old at the time when he saw Jaws on TV, saw the movie, he asked his daddy, he said daddy, was there really an Indianapolis ship? And his daddy said I think so. Why don't you go to the library and research? Well the kid went to the library. He found that there was an Indianapolis. Then he got to reading about it. And then he put an ad in the paper anybody knows any survivors, to contact him. And I had a good buddy in Mobile, Alabama, that he saw it in the newspaper or one of his friends called him, and so he called Hunter, the kid, and talked to him and then Hunter took it on himself to research it, did school work about the Indianapolis. Then he went to the congressmen of Florida. Then he went to Washington with a congressman and they went door to door in the legislature in the Congress and he got the thing going. And then when they did that, the media got onto it with this young kid and then they began to tell the story, and that's how we finally got the captain exonerated was a foolish young kid that took it

on himself to tell the story and try to right a wrong that the Navy had done. And by the way, Hunter Scott has been hunting on my ranch, deer hunting, with he and his family, and I'll tell you a little story to show you what kind of a young man he was. He was about 15 or 16 when he came to hunt with me on the ranch, and we were driving out to a deerstand and I said Hunter, he had his little 12-year-old sister and his daddy with him, I said Hunter, you're big enough to play a little football now, aren't you? And he said yes sir, everything yes sir, no sir. And his daddy said yeah, he plays, but he liked to not go, and I said oh, what happened? Well what had happened was, the first day of school that they came out for football, Hunter came out for football and whenever after the end of the practice that first day, he went by the coach's office and told him he wouldn't be back for football. And the coach said how come, Hunter? And he said you were doing good. You'll probably make the team. Hunter said sir, I don't like your language, I don't like the four letter words and the way that you treat the boys. Well, the next morning, this coach called Hunter into his office and he said Hunter, I lay awake half the night thinking of what you told me, and he said, if you'll come back, I think I can control some of my four letter words. Now that's one boy, one young man that stood up for what's right, and I try to tell the students that I talk with to have guts enough to stand up for what's right and you'll be surprised how many other students join you, instead of being a gang, you'll be a force that will rule the world, some day, I mean by that I mean Christ will appear in the world and the enemies be defeated if we'll do what's right, and so I, the God I know is a loving God with peace. I don't know the other kind of God that the other terrorists, enemies claim they have. I don't know that. I hope I never believe it. I believe in Christ and in God and I always will and I tell you, I don't go around preaching, but I very well could because of the faith I have.

*Do you believe, I mean based on that, I mean do you believe you've led a blessed life with everything you've been through?*

**L. D. Cox:** I certainly do. I mean I've been blessed in so many ways all through my life, and oh, I've had setbacks, I've had things happen, I've had bad health and I've had this and that, but all in all, I don't know why I was spared from the ocean, but hopefully I've done something to right everything and help the country and help the students and individuals.

*After the sinking, I know after a lot of traumatic incidents in peoples' life, they feel like they have a new purpose in life. Did you feel that way after the war?*

**L. D. Cox:** Well, I could say yes, but I didn't feel like I had a new purpose. I was always, I had been baptized into the church before I went into the Navy and I maintained my faith, and have sense, and I don't mean that I'm near, anywhere near perfect. I do a lot of things and leave undone things that I should do, but as far as being blessed and having a purpose, I hope that some of the things that I have done will further, you know, peoples' lives and peace and the cause of this country.

*Well as you relive this story of not only the sinking but your war time service, how do you deal with it on a daily basis and especially the traumatic sinking and being in the water? Do you dream about that? Do you often think about it?*

**L. D. Cox:** I think about it every day and I dream about it every night. I can tell you every night I have nightmares of being lost, and maybe not in the water, but of some big city or some stock show, livestock show or somewhere and I can't find any of my buddies and I don't know for sure where I am or how to get somewhere, and it's just a turmoil that it happens every night and I don't know how to make it quit. I just live with it and that's all I can do.

*And you think that might be related to the sinking and being at sea?*

**L. D. Cox:** Why certainly I think, any time that you are alone and your lost and you don't know, you can't find somebody, that's directly what was happening in the ocean all the time that I was there.

*What about you mentioned talking to kids and about the message today and I know you do a lot of that – what do you tell kids about not just about, but about public service? Because one of the things that we talk about here is that there's just not the emphasis on public service that there was, and especially do you talk to current active duty military and what do you say?*

**L. D. Cox:** Well, according to the audience, I tell the story just as I've told it to you. The last talk that I made was about a couple of months ago I guess to the club over in Stephenville, and the professor at Tarlton wanted me to come and talk to his history class. I haven't done that yet. But I tell my story and I tell how great it is to be free and be in, an American. I just every day I turn the news on, I have to turn it off. Of all the discontentment, the, it's amazing how one country is supposed to be one country and of all the dissension, everything you turn on is combative, and it gripes me to be a certain kind of American. You're not a certain kind of American, you're an American or you're nothing at all. You're not an Afro-American, you're not an Hispo-American, you're not a Scottish American, you're American. And I'm, my breeding that I, I'm part Indian, I'm a 1/16<sup>th</sup> Cherokee, mostly Irish, have some Scotch in me and I think maybe a little French, but I'm an American. I don't go around saying that I'm an Indian American or Scottish American or whatever, and that's what really gripes my tail end, and another thing, why they don't make English a major language and be done with it. What they gonna do is to be like Canada, they're gonna have a Quebec on their hands where they all speak French or all speak Spanish, and you can't understand 'em and you have the most divisive thing in this country is the language barrier, and why our politicians don't have sense enough to see that, I don't know. But it used to whenever we had people come into this country, they tried to be an American, they tried to learn English, and did learn it, and now I've got off of my soap box, you can ask me another question.

*No, I appreciate it. We're very grateful to be able to talk to you, and I just want to say I don't think I have any more questions. Is there anything, any stories that we missed or anything you wanted to share, maybe after you got back? I know we didn't touch much on life after you got back out of the service. Was there something else you might want to talk about how you felt when you came home?*

**L. D. Cox:** Well, I'm not through with that other yet. What I'm gonna tell you is, I may sound like a racist and I may be part, but I tell you this, some of my best friends are Spanish. I've got a man that's worked for me 18 years and he's a Mexican and he's no finer individual anywhere, and if people that come over here legally and try to make a citizen, I have no objection whatsoever. But we've got to control our population. We've got to speak the same language. We've got to have Americans instead of being some other kind of American, and all I can say is that I appreciate men like you, I appreciate what you're doing. The history needs to be kept and needs, people need to hear it because history repeats itself, and if you don't know what has happened in the past, you're not gonna know what's gonna happen in the future and won't be prepared for it, and you just, you can just mark my word, history will repeat itself and we're right now in war and we continually have enemies, and if we don't stick together as one nation under God, why we're in poor shape.

*I agree. I think we both agree with that sentiment here. Well again, I appreciate being able to talk with you today. I mean it's, I hope you understand that we want this program and this oral history program to survive for future generations because history does repeat itself and that's one of the things that, the messages that we want to carry to the next generation or that men like you exist and did amazing things and in an amazing time, and –*

**L. D. Cox:** I was one of the fortunate ones. I was one of the lucky ones and I got to tell you this that I don't know where people get the idea that well, I do know, too, that our youth is no good and they're in gangs and everything, and I'm sure we got plenty of that, but I want to tell you we've got a lots of real fine young people in schools and you'd be surprised how polite, how nice, how attentive they are when you're talking to 'em and tell 'em something about history. It's amazing and I really appreciate 'em and we've got a lot of good teachers in a lot of good jobs. It's just that maybe we didn't start soon enough on our history lessons.

*I understand. Well let me ask one other question. Do you know are there any other Indianapolis survivors here in Texas?*

**L. D. Cox:** Yes, I know of about three or four. One of 'em is in pretty bad condition and lives in Waco. His name is Buck Gibson and he's been at the VA hospital and I don't know that he's in there, I think he's in maybe hospice care or special living. I don't know if he's in a nursing home. I'm not for sure about it. But anyway there's Buck Gibson and then we have a Wilcox, Lindsay Wilcox down at Baytown, Texas, and then we have a Glen Morgan that was our bugler there in Weatherford, Texas, and we have another Cletus Lebeau in Memphis, Texas, and there may be one or two more but they don't attend many meetings and I don't know 'em very well if they are.

*Do you think it would be appropriate for us to try to talk to them and get their story as well?*

**L. D. Cox:** Oh sure, I'm, they're, they're all very talkative, very, a lot of information except Buck. He cries and he can't talk like he used to a long time ago. I mean he's of a condition, a mindset that I don't think he would, but you never know what –

*Do you think we could get those, that contact information from maybe the association, or - ?*

**L. D. Cox:** Yeah, our president is \_\_\_ Bray, in California and has been for years, been a president that live in, Paul Murphy, and he's, he would be a good one to contact about the addresses, phone numbers, and in fact, I probably have it right here if you want to – I've got what we call a blue book. It's got phone numbers in it.

*Well if you wouldn't mind, we'd certainly appreciate that.*

**L. D. Cox:** All right, hold on.

*And I tell you what, what we can do is let's go ahead and finish the interview and then I may have James Crabtree call you back. Now which one was the bugler?*

**L. D. Cox:** Glen W. Morgan.

*Glen Morgan, OK. OK, well I appreciate that information and I'll, I don't want to take up any more of your time. I just want to say on behalf of myself and James Crabtree and Commissioner Patterson, we deeply appreciate you talking to us today and I know I personally am honored to talk to you and I appreciate you telling us your story.*

**L. D. Cox:** Well, it's a pleasure and hopefully I'll get to meet you in person some time.

*Well we'd love that.*

**L. D. Cox:** If you're over around Fredericksburg on the 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, I'll be there, Lord willing.

*Well I just, I checked my schedule and I certainly want to be there, so I think what I'll do now is let me turn it back over to James Crabtree and he'll tell you a little bit more about what's gonna happen next with the DVD and things like that, but as it stands right now, I'll conclude the interview and just say thank you again very much and maybe I'll see you out in Fredericksburg.*

**L. D. Cox:** I hope so.

[End of recording]