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U.S. Coast Guard Oral History Program

CDR RAY EVANS, USCG (Ret.)

Transcript of video interview with Commander Ray Evans regarding his Coast Guard service and that of his friend, Douglas Munro



Ray Evans' enlistment photo.

Note: The following is a transcript of a video interview with Commander Ray Evans, USCG (Ret.) about his service in the Coast Guard and about his friend and shipmate, Signalmen First Class Douglas Munro, USCG. Evans participated in the mission at Guadalcanal where Munro gave his life in action against the Japanese. Munro was



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awarded the Medal of Honor for that action and Evans was awarded the Navy Cross. The interview was done in 1999 as part of a video documentary on Douglas Munro.

TRAVIS: The most difficult question other than, how did I talk you into doing this is, how do you want to be identified?

EVANS: Well, I go by Ray but it's Commander Raymond J. Evans but, but I go by Ray.

TRAVIS: OK.

EVANS: I sign all of my checks and letters and everything R. J.

TRAVIS: So, if I put your name on the screen, do you want to see Ray or Raymond?

EVANS: Well, if you want to be completely accurate, it would be Raymond.

TRAVIS: Raymond.

EVANS: That's what the Coast Guard has me.

TRAVIS: OK. Now you weren't always. . .

EVANS: I hate, I hated signing my name Raymond J. Evans all through the Coast Guard but, dad was Ray J. So, I didn't dare take Ray.

TRAVIS: I'm William Early Jr., but everything's Bill. So, the Coast Guard has me as Bill, so I know. You weren't always an officer.

EVANS: No, started as an enlisted in 1939, as an Apprentice Seaman at 21 dollars a month.

TRAVIS: How did you join the Coast Guard? Tell me about that.

EVANS: Came out of high school and looked for a job all summer in 1939 and it was a very poor time for jobs and, went to the Coast Guard and they said they had not taken a recruit in 7 years and that was all through the depression of course and , they called me back in September and said, "are you still interested? We've got 7 openings", and I said, "yes I am". And that's how it started.

TRAVIS: You were, where were you living?



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EVANS: In Seattle and, when I got to the, federal building on September 18, Doug Munro was there and he was one of the 7. So we went to, signed up. Went to Port Angeles together to the air station 'cause there was no training station and, I guess we were there about a week when they said that the [CGC] *Spencer's* on the permanent transfer from Valdez, Alaska to New York and they need 7 crew members to fill out their crew. I was the eighth volunteer. Doug was in the seventh. But, one guy dropped out so, I got on and we became the "Gold Dust Twins" on the *Spencer*.

TRAVIS: You and Doug.

EVANS: Yeah, we were together so much then. In those days, the soap was called "The Gold Dust Twins" you know and they had the twins on the label and that's what they called us and many times, couldn't tell us apart. I mean, we didn't look a like but they would mix us up... and that's how it started.

TRAVIS: You, you're, were you a signalman also?

EVANS: We, we were both , , interested in , becoming quartermasters and, when, the war started when, in the early days, the Coast Guard decided it was time to get their signalmen back. You know, they give them up during peacetime, but they have them during wartime. They have to communicate with the Navy. And so we both requested and became signalmen strikers and eventually third class signalmen. Which didn't mean a lot of money really. If you remember the pay scale, it's 21, 36, 54. First class seamen was 54 dollars a month (whoooo). When you made third class petty officer, it was 72. It was great. (laughing) But, it went a long way. It went quite a ways.

TRAVIS: Now when you guys joined up, I was talking to Doug's sister, Pat, and she was telling me that she came and saw you guys off when you headed to New York.

EVANS: She probably did, but I don't even remember that.

TRAVIS: Oh. . .

EVANS: Yeah, she probably did.

TRAVIS: Did you, did you know Doug before then, had you met him?

EVANS: No, never had. No. The interesting thing is, that I did live in Cle Elum when I was 5 years old. Well, I was younger than that. My dad was in charge of the telephone office in Bellingham, I mean in Cle Elum and I was born in Bellingham, but, he ran a telephone office for several years while I was, oh, 3, 4, 5, 6 years old. If you go to Cle Elum today and go down the main street, there's a little brick building that's Pacific



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Telephone / Telegraph Museum now. That was his building. But no, I didn't know Doug before we met.

TRAVIS: So, what happened after you two took off for New York? You went through the [Panama] Canal?

EVANS Yeah, and arrived in New York in November in a snow storm. But anyway, we ended up at Staten Island, Staten Island at Pier 18 and, that's where we were based out of and started doing weather patrols, neutrality patrols, etc. . . . Um, eventually, you want me to keep rolling on here, eventually the Navy took over the old Army transports and we're going to man 5 of 'em I think with Coast Guard personnel. Beginning of the war, very early, before we got into it actually and, so, we decided we would apply to go over to the [U.S.S.] *Hunter Liggett* [AP-27/AP-14]. We harassed Harold Berdine who was the Exec [Executive Officer] on the *Spencer* until he finally, he said, "I can't let both of you go at once" and we harassed him until finally he just gave up and said, "O.K., get out of here" and he transferred us both and we thought we were going to become ship's company, but when we arrived, we found we were assigned to Commander Transport Division Seven staff.

So, we became staff signalmen and Dwight Dexter was personnel officer for the staff. He was a lieutenant commander, lieutenant commander, Coast Guard. All the rest of the staff officers were Navy because they didn't believe, the Navy felt that it took someone, familiar with convoy operations to head-up the division. So, we had Commodore G. B. Ash [who] was our transport division commander and we had the *Hunter Liggett* [and] the [USS] *American Legion* [AP-35; not a Coast Guard-manned transport; she may have had some Coast Guard personnel aboard, however] and the [USS] *Joseph T. Dickman* [APA-13]. All three, Coast Guard-manned vessels [see note next to the *American Legion* reference above] and we went from ship to ship to India, eventually, carrying British soldiers on the *American Legion* and the *Dickman*. It came back while *Hunter Liggett* spent all that time in Philadelphia Navy Yard and when we got back, back aboard the *Hunter Liggett*, we did amphibious training with Marines off of New River in North Carolina for several weeks and ended up in the convoy to the South Pacific. And on the trip to India, we were 250 miles south of Cape Town, South Africa when we listened on Sunday morning and heard, bombs on Pearl Harbor. So, we were in the war.

TRAVIS: What was that like?

EVANS: Uh, well, we had expected that. It was not unexpected to have it happen. Just where it happened. We had , the convoy had been routed to Bahia, Brazil and way across the South Pacific pass the Ascensions in order to avoid the German submarines on the, on the west coast of Africa and that's why we were due south of Cape Town



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coming north. Went down around and came up to get away from them. That's why we were there. We went on to Bombay and came back and, came back in time to do, do the training with the Marines in New River and then in a big convoy to the South Pacific. Ended up in Wellington, New Zealand. The staging area for Guadalcanal. We Americans tend to find humor, even in the middle of war. In the middle of the worst conditions.

TRAVIS: Did they ever get Champagne Charlie?

EVANS: I don't think so. I don't think so. Unless they got him on the ground at Rabaul eventually, you know. Well, we were fortunate, in a way, to have a Australian coastwatchers, the coastwatcher on New Georgia, for instance, would tell us when they were coming. We had twenty-minute warning before the planes ever got to Guadalcanal. And so, he would tell us how many, what they were and what to expect. And that really, that really helped.

TRAVIS: I've read about those guys that's just amazing story.

EVANS: Yeah, yeah they were. The coastwatchers were an amazing bunch of guys . And they packed these big heavy radios. They didn't have the nice light things that we have today; they were great big unwieldy things, and the batteries were unwieldy, and it took about ten or so of of of their native carriers to carry all the equipment, you know. And they would set up and and were apprehensive that the [Japanese] would find them at any minute, you know.

TRAVIS: Uh huh.

EVANS: And some of them were; they did lose some of them.

TRAVIS: OK. So you're back at, you're on Guadalcanal, you, ah, what I was going to ask you, what did you guys have to eat?

EVANS: Um, C-rations, mostly. And one time they after things well . . . At one point I think in about October the Navy sent in a construction unit which had a signal gang. And they took over all the duties of all the signal crew. And all my signal people were dispersed back to their vessels except I stayed there with Commander [Dwight] Dexter [USCG]. And they they put me with Martin Clemons working with Australia. Umm, they had a twenty-six foot schooner with a three-man crew, Malaysian crew. Had a three cylinder Gardner diesel engine in it. Did six knots wide open. Umm, and twice I took umm a Marine reconnaissance squadron all the way around to the other side of the island to follow DeClark's mission. And the second trip is when I got came down with



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malaria. And after that they shipped me out in November the, I couldn't take it anymore. So I went back to the *Hunter Liggett*.

TRAVIS: Yeah, I heard most everybody there had some kind of, everybody got pretty sick there, huh?

EVANS: (nodding) Yeah. What happened to me was we ran out of atebirin and quinine on that trip, on that reconnaissance trip. And if you didn't take your atebirin, you ended up with malaria. And there was a lot of dysentery and dingy fever and it, it's jungle, you know. It was pleasant where we were, we were on the plantation [Lever Brothers coconut plantation], on the beach, and it was, umm a lot like, you're familiar with Hawaii, and Tahiti and places like that. But when you got back behind the airfield, into the jungle, it was it a mean place. It was a mean place.

TRAVIS: Tell me about this hut that you and Doug built.

EVANS: Oh that was simply an army pup tent put over some, some framing, just a form of shelter from the rain. And we built it at the base of the signal tower. (laughs) It was convenient.

TRAVIS: I've heard it described as a palace compared to the . . .

EVANS: Well no, no, no. It was just, just a place with a coupl'a sleeping pads laid down on the floor and a roof over it, that's all. It was not, it was not a palace.

TRAVIS: Well, how did you guys end up taking Marines into the beach?

EVANS: (sighs)

TRAVIS: When . . .

EVANS: I'll tell you this the best I can.

TRAVIS: OK.

EVANS: I recall a major came down and a battalion major came down and I don't remember his name [Major Ortho L. Rodgers, USMC] I don't think I ever knew his name really. He, he talked to Dexter and the next thing I know, the commander is telling us that Doug and I -- that they were going to send this battalion, I guess it was a battalion of Marines, to land umm at Point Cruz. As I understood the situation, they had tried to cross the Matanikau River. And the Japanese were well entrenched on the other side of the river and they [the Marines] couldn't get across. So they sent a contingent up into



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the mountain, across the back of 'em to get behind them. And the, and the plan was to send these by water four miles across and land them at Point Cruz behind the Matanikau River, beyond it, and, and get them in a pincer movement.

Ahh, and so they came; we loaded up a, I don't know, ah ten or twelve infantry boats, and five or six tank lighters and under covering fire from the destroyer [U.S.S.] *Ballard* [AVD-10] made an amphibious landing. Umm, unfortunately, we were supposed to land at the head of the cove and we found the coral would not allow us to do that so we had to make an abrupt right turn and land on the beach. At the side. And we warned the major that immediately after they left the boat he should have his men make an immediate left and go to the head of the, to to follow their plan. But unfortunately he caught a mortar immediately after he got off the boat and he never gave that order. So they went up the wrong hill and the wrong place right into the Japanese and eventually they ran past the Japanese lines and then had to fight their way back through it to get to the beach.

In the meantime, all our boats had gone back to the base except the major had requested we leave one boat behind, for immediate casualties. And so I stayed, I elected to stay behind and I had a coxswain named Sam Roberts from Portland, and the two of us were laying to in this LCP. Unfortunately, we laid too close to the beach and the Japanese fired an automatic weapon at us and hit Roberts, hit all the controls, the vacuum controls on the boat. I slammed it into "full-ahead" and we tore out of there and I tore back to the, to the base, four miles, and when I got to the base, I pulled it out of gear, but it wouldn't come out of gear, so we ran up on the beach, which is a long sloping sand beach. Ran up on the beach the full length of the boat before it stopped.

Umm, and Roberts unfortunately, they got him in an evacuation plane to New Hebrides, and he died on the way, very sad. Then, no sooner had that happened then word came down that they [the Marine landing force] had to be evacuated. And so back we go. And this time, Doug said, we had two air-cooled Louis machine guns between us, with rotary drums if you remember, you've seen that kind, so we elected to stay on one boat with the two guns and act as kind of a covering fire, while we sent the rest of the boats in to load these people. And they had lost a, I think they had twenty-five casualties and then they had about twenty-five that were wounded, and we got all the wounded and all the all the rest of them off and, the last tank lighter load started out to sea and we followed him and found one tank lighter around the point was stuck on the beach and couldn't get off. So we sent that tank lighter with us in to tow him off and we acted as covering again. And we were having no fire from beach whatsoever. It was relatively easy. And he got him off and both the tank lighters headed off to sea and we headed out to sea behind him. And I saw that, and Doug was facing forward, and I was standing up by the coxswain looking back, I saw this line of waterspouts coming across the water, and I yelled at Doug to get down, he couldn't hear me over the engine noise,



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and it hit him. It was one burst of fire. And that's how he died. And that's how it happened.

TRAVIS: I've interviewed three of the Marines you guys got off that beach, and they can't say enough about the Coast Guard.

EVANS: We just did a job. We were asked to take them over there, and we were asked to bring them back off a there, and that what we did. That's what the Coast Guard does. We do what we're asked to do.

TRAVIS: How is it you think that, I agree that's what the Coast Guard does, and I know that's what we do, how do you think we get these, you were what twenty years old?

EVANS: About.

TRAVIS: And Doug was twenty years old?

EVANS: Uh huh.

TRAVIS: And I look at, I look at kids that work for me now and they're just baby-faced kids and I look at Doug's picture back then and he was a baby-faced kid, and I'm sure you were to, how is it you get these twenty year old kids to do something like that?

EVANS: I don't know. Umm, what do, what do we pay for an F-16 aircraft?

TRAVIS: Millions.

EVANS: Yeah, and we've got a twenty-two year old kid flying it. And he does a helluva job. I don't know. I don't think every kid that age could do it, but it seemed like most us were about that age, you know. Our sergeants and Marine sergeants were older, some of the corporals were older, but all of the, all of "the guys" were in their twenties and there was a . . . I hate to say this but I feel there was a different feeling back then, there was more patriotism, there was more love of country, there was more concern for country. Today I feel that that's faded. Quite a lot. And it, it's disappointing. But, that war was fought for a cause. We'd been attacked. Every war since then has been one somewhere else, fighting for some other country, for some cause that a lot of people don't understand. And don't agree with. And that's caused a great deal of dissention, I think, in our country. Unfortunately. And, and since World War II, our military has experienced times of times of strength and times of weakness, which right now we're pretty weak, actually. And that scares some of us that like to feel the country would be better protected if we had more defense spending. And that's enough of that. I'm not, I'm not a politician I'm not gonna get into that. (laughs)



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TRAVIS: OK. Do a tape change here real quick.

EVANS: You know, you grow up pretty fast, and you given responsibility, and you, uh, are required to carry it out, and it's uh, it's uh,...I don't know. I guess we grew up pretty fast---sigh!

TRAVIS: Explain to me a little bit---and, and this is just because I don't understand. How many Coast Guard people were there on each one of these landing crafts?

EVANS: Three! We had uh, we had uh,...well, actually two; we had a coxswain and an engineer manning each boat. A hundred league of that --- thirty-five landing crafts hanging in davit, each davit had two boats. Uh, two sitting in a cradle one on top of the other, and then one hanging over the side. And we had thirty-five of those, and than we carried uh, two tank-lighters on the uh, hatches of two of the holds were, was the tank-lighters those were like fifty-ton jobs; big twin diesel engines to carry a Sherman tank. Uh, the landing craft we carried, probably uh, oh, I don't know,...they were twenty-foot long about. They probably carry uh, twenty, twenty to twenty-five people in each one, but they had, uh, a coxswain and a engineer assigned to each one. When the, when the, the fleet . . . After we landed the troops of Guadalcanal, the word went out to all the auxiliaries that they would leave one boat and one crew behind when they left. So we ended up with about half uh, half Navy and half Coast Guard on the beach. And, uh, I don't know, perhaps, uh, fifty men, and ah, uh, Commander Dexter, and we had uh, young ensign [that] was his exec, uh, and I don't even remember his name. I think he had another officer there to, but I don't remember him either. Uh, 'bout a week after the landing most of the Navy guys (chuckle) uh, went back to their vessels. They left the boats behind, but most of them went back to their vessels. So we ended up with essentially, perhaps, ninety-percent Coast Guard operating the naval operations basin and a few Navy people. And, uh, that's just the way it happened. They were, uh, uh,...I have no idea. I don't want to say on camera (chuckle)! You'll have to cut this part out, Bill!

TRAVIS: Okay.

EVANS: Uh, it, it just didn't work out. They didn't the two services just didn't work well together --- in that particular instance anyway. That close it, closer ordeal, and uh, perhaps, they resented having, uh, Coast Guard officers over them, I don't know. But, but as I say, we ended up with mostly Coast Guard in a naval operating base, and uh, it worked well. Wasn't easy. The ships had come in, and uh, and they worked night and day unloading them, you know, and uh, Japanese Bettys [Mitsubishi G4M "Type 1" land-based, twin engine, naval bomber] would come over, and the torpedo-bombers would come over, uh every day, uh, more than once a day so that you were interrupted constantly. You'd work for three or four hours, and then, uh, get the alarm sounded,



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and then, the uh, the ships would scatter, and the boats would be left all over (chuckle) hell's half-acre. Uh, it was, it was a hectic time.

TRAVIS: How was it that you ended up on the same boat with Doug when you went back in there, 'cause there was three of you --- you said there was a coxswain, and you and Doug?

EVANS: Oh! When we went back to get 'em?

TRAVIS: Uh huh.

EVANS: Well, because we had the two guns, and we decided we probably needed some covering power to, to, covering fire for these guys coming out on this little tiny beach. And there was a very narrow little sand beach, the jungle came down within five or six feet of the water. So there were hardly any beach when the boats' bows were up right into the, almost into the brush! Uh, so we would layoff kind of behind them, and uh, and act as a covering for 'em, and uh, and as they filled up, uh, we would, uh, we would, just send in more boats, as we pulled those off the beach and send in some more, and we'd just stay there as a cover, and uh, that was the best way to do it, uh at least the way we saw it. We only had, had the only two pieces of armament in the whole deal, you know (chuckle).

TRAVIS: So, you didn't, and, and you didn't--there wasn't any resistance --- you, you weren't actually firing back?

EVANS: No. Not to my knowledge. There may have been, but if there were I never noticed it! But it was, uh . . .

TRAVIS: When you first went in and actually landed on the first time were there any uh...were you in a fire-fight then or...?

EVANS: No! No, uh...

TRAVIS: You were telling me about the, the fox holes.

EVANS: What they did...Yeah, what they did as, as the Marines explained it to us, and I don't know, if you've run into this talking with these three Marines, but they said they went up...as they went through this fringe of jungle, and then they opened out into this slopping field, and they went up this field...The [Japanese] built fox holes, [whereas] we built trenches, they build vertical holes that they stand in, and they put a cover over them --- like a lid. And they [the Marines] marched all the way up the hill past these things, and then they [the Japanese] flip the lids back, and the Marines are up there,



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and the Marines had to fight their way back through them to get back to the beach. Uh, that's where the casualties occurred. They had a hard time. They, uh, laid down some kind of a signal, uh, for an aircraft to see so that they uh, saw that they had to be taken out, you know. That's, uh, and that's when we went back to get 'em.

TRAVIS: Uh, the way they explained it to me is they did signal for aircraft, and they were...the aircraft ignored 'em because they thought they were Japanese. They didn't--they didn't know there were any Marines over there...

EVANS: Oh! Is that right?

TRAVIS: . . . and the other two groups that were gonna come across the river for the pincer movement, never made it...

EVANS: No, they didn't make it.

TRAVIS: . . . so these guys are hung out to dry. . .

EVANS: So they were really hanging out, and that's true.

TRAVIS: . . . and they credit you guys for seeing what was going on...and saying, we'd better get these guys out of here.

EVANS: I...I don't know how we, how they got the word back, but as I said I got back with Roberts right after I got back. Uh, Dexter came running out and uh, yelled at the two of us, and said, we gotta go back and get 'em out. The word's come down that they, they have to be evacuated they're in an impossible situation. And so we gathered up all the boats and all the crews again and away we went. Right, turn---practically turned around and went right back! Uh....(sigh), I don't know how he got the word? I had always thought that it came from the aircraft. Maybe, maybe some way it filtered through. Who knows, ha!

TRAVIS: I think eventually somebody, they said eventually somebody figured out it was our guys over there...

EVANS: Yeah.

TRAVIS: . . . but at first they were ignoring...

EVANS: Yeah! I see where they would. No, it was a plan that---that really failed. Uh...,and I don't think it was a bad plan, it just uh, was one of those things; some 'em work, some 'em don't. And, uh, the fact that the major was killed immediately when he



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stepped ashore I think uh, was a key to the thing because he had did not have time to communicate with his junior officers to tell 'em what to do. And so, the Marines will charge and that's what they did, they charged! (chuckle) Got to admire those guys. I really feel a great deal of pride that uh, when they received the Presidential Unit Citation for Guadalcanal First Marine Division, that they gave to all us Coast Guard that were there with 'em. And that was-that was great. It's an honor. (pause) But...what else can I tell you?

TRAVIS: Uh, the uh..., I think one thing that, that I admire about the Marine Corps more so then the Coast Guard, is the fact that they do remember to honor people, and they do have more of sense of their own history.

EVANS: Yes they do. They have the greatest *esprit de corps*. Uh...,I...,You know we have a great history too, and I...I think we remembered. Uh...they uh...,they...there were a few good men . They were a small outfit you know, and they, they could pick and choose.

TRAVIS: Yeah...They still honor you guys from that--I've seen the displays when September rolls around over at, at the uh, Marine Corps barracks over by the Pentagon, they still put up...

EVANS: They do?

TRAVIS: Oh yeah.

EVANS: Oh yeah? Well, its uh, its been a long time ago. A long time ago!

TRAVIS: Tell me a little bit about what kind of guy Doug was when you first met him at that recruiting station. What was your --- what kind of impression did you have?

EVANS: Well, (chuckle) Doug was, uh, outgoing, into everything, interested in everything, uh, fun to be with. Energetic, uh, kind of uh, physically not uh, not uh, he wasn't frail, but he's was not robust. He was thin and wiry. But uh, uhm, I remember when he got pneumonia, and I was really concerned about him. He ended up in the hospital---Naval Hospital Staten Island for, for a week. Uh, finally recovered from that. He was subject to uh, uh, occasionally subject to migraine headaches, and that he'd end up in sickbay for three or four days. Couldn't fight migraine headaches. But he was fun to be with.

We had....when we got to New York the, the New York Worlds Fair was in progress for a year, and every liberty we were at the fair grounds, and up in White Plans going to the fair. We spent days on the fairgrounds. Uh, I think we went through every building



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there and rode on every ride they had. It was big liberty. Oh gee! Get off the ship at uh, pier eighteen, and ride the, the bus up to Saint George to the ferry terminal, take the ferry to the battery, walk across the battery go into the bar (chuckle) and get a drink (chuckle), and then go to the fair on the subway! New York was fun in those days. Uh, I went back, and uh...uh...sometime I was on duty in Houston, along 'bout uh...uh, 60, 1960 after the *Amoco Virginia* fire in Houston [explosion and fire involving the SS *Amoco Virginia* and tank barges *H.T. Co. No. 40* and *46* and *Gissel 1601* and *2001* in Houston Ship channel, 8 November 1959 with loss of life], I went to New York to a seminar on the fire, and it was a completely different city. Uh, when we were there we roamed all over town, uh, without uh, without fear you might say. Uh, when I went back to the seminar they said don't go out your hotel alone after dark at night, don't walk on the streets, don't uh, this and that. It was...its a bad deal --- wasn't the New York that I knew, you know. So, what is it now? Worst now then it was then even? I don't know. Maybe so.

Don't go out alone, you know, uh. I remember Times Square on New Year's Day when Times Square was full of people (chuckle), and you just went with the flow, you know. You couldn't move...you couldn't go anywhere you wanted to go, you went with the crowd until you got to the edge, and got out! (chuckle)

TRAVIS: Did you do that with Doug?

EVANS: Yeah, we, we were on Time Square at New Years, and...and uh,...ha! Oh, that was fun!

TRAVIS: What year was that?

EVANS: That was 1940, I would imagine-1939? That was New Years of 1940! Must'a been...'cause we signed-up in, uh, September. Would uh been uh, would uh been January 1st, 1940.

TRAVIS: Did he have any nicknames?

EVANS: (sigh)...Not really, that I, that I remember. No.

TRAVIS: I've seen...

EVANS: What?

TRAVIS: No, I've seen pictures of --- I was, I was just curious 'cause I...I've seen pictures of him, uh, all you guys I guess. Must have been when you guys were heading over toward New Zealand. Were you guys, were you guys boxing or wrestling, or...



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EVANS: No, no, he did. I didn't.

TRAVIS: He boxed?

EVANS: He tried. (chuckle) He had, had boxing matches on the uh, *Spencer*. That, that was on the cutter. That was before uh,...I think that was...I don't know! That was not on the, on the transport, I don't think. But, uh, yeah, he tried to, he tried to be a boxer. I think he taken boxing in college. He had a year of college, uh, and I guess that's where he did it. I didn't participate, I was uh, a spectator! (chuckle)

TRAVIS: You're a lover, not a fighter, huh? (chuckle)

EVANS: No, I tried to be uh, I tried to be a boxer in uh, in high school --- as a freshman in high school. And I found out that every time they hit me on the jaw I got a terrific headache that lasted for three hours! And so since you have a glass jaw you might just as well not take part. So I took up other things. I was more of the, I was more of the writer, and a wordsmith, am today. I guess that's what I am today is a wordsmith. I got that from my dad, I think. He read the dictionary three times from cover to cover, which I thought was amazing. He taught himself three new words every week, and used them so that he would remember how to use them, and what they were, you know . . .

TRAVIS: Ah!

EVANS: . . . the meanings. And, I guess, I guess I got that from him.

TRAVIS: Have you done that too?

EVANS: I enjoyed writing essays, and papers in high school, and it's just gone on from there. I'm a detail-administrator-type, and pretty good at being an administrator. That's okay to say, isn't it? (chuckle)

TRAVIS: It is.

EVANS: You should have a certain amount of self-esteem, and I think I have enough of that! (chuckle)

TRAVIS: That's okay. I boxed some in high school too. I think that's part of what my problem is now. (chuckle)

EVANS: No, I, I recall the coach said I don't think you should do this Mr. Evans, and I said yeah, I agree. My head hurts! Ha, ha. That was the end of boxing.



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TRAVIS: There wasn't--cough!--excuse me...

EVANS: I tried to play football, too. I played on the football team. Uh, that wasn't too bad. The made me a guard. You remember...have you seen pictures the old football helmets, just the leather helmets with the ear guard? I wore one of those. I was a guard. I did get a letter in basketball.

TRAVIS: Yeah?

EVANS: That was only because I set on the bench the whole season, and then in the last game the coach said: "You go in and go down underneath the goal, and when he throws you the ball you, make the basket," and I was scared to death. But sure enough out of all the melee up here here came the ball to me, and I'm all alone down there. And I throw it up and it goes in, and we win the game! So I got, I got a letter for Blaine High School.

TRAVIS: And that's in Blaine....

EVANS: ...extent of my sports.

TRAVIS: Blaine High School's in...you grew up in ...

EVANS: Yeah, I . . .

TRAVIS: After you moved from Cle Elum where did you move to?

EVANS: Well, Dad went back to Bellingham, and eventually to Seattle, and . . . at some point in time I went out to spend a summer on a farm, and end up living with, on a farm for four years up at Blaine, with the Worthentons. And that's how I got to Blaine High School. Then I came back and graduated from Broadway, in my junior and senior year in high school in Seattle.

TRAVIS: Where, where, what year were you born?

EVANS: 1921.

TRAVIS: Okay, so your my dad's age. No actually he's 1920, so he's a year older than you.

EVANS: Think of some more good questions?

TRAVIS: Say what?! (chuckle) You guys didn't go to boot camp. There wasn't a for...



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EVANS: No, there wasn't one.

TRAVIS: What kind of formal training did you get?

EVANS: None! We uh, we did the lawn, and cut . . . mowed the lawn, worked in the galley. Uh, peeled potatoes; the usual things that you see in the cartoons. That's the kind of thing that we did for a week at, at, at the air station. Helped uh, pushed-in those days the amphibians uh,--you'd...they taxied into the water, and then you took the wheels off. You, you familiar with that?

TRAVIS: Yes.

EVANS: And when they land, and come back in they'd put the nose up on the ramp, and then they'd wade into the water, and you'd re-attach the wheel, and then they taxi out on a, on a ramp. Those are the kinds of things we did for, but...I don't know. I guess we were there ten days before the *Spencer* came.

TRAVIS: How did you learn your job. I mean, you did an extraordinary thing at Guadalcanal, but with.., how did you get trained to do what your doing?

EVANS: As a signalman?

TRAVIS: Well the whole thing.

EVANS: First of all when we got aboard the *Spencer*, we were compartment cleaners, ah, that's what we did until we became signal strikers and when we went up on the bridge we had an old chief named Mulder who was a first class because every time he made chief when he'd went on liberty and come back late and they'd bust him back right to first class and so but he was an excellent teacher and he taught us to be quartermasters and we essentially taught ourselves to be signalmen.

We'd practice by the hour on the transport while we were tied up at the dock for instance; we'd go up to the bridge and sit at one end its a wide bridge you can visualize it --- the bridge on a transport its maybe 50 feet or 35-40 feet across the bridge we'd sit at each end of it with the aldis light and send to each other and our principle of ah of learning was send as fast as you can read what you can if you constantly send a message faster than the guy can read it he picks up his speed; pretty soon he is getting more and more of it. That's how we got built up our speed as signalmen ah but its just a matter of practice. And then as I said when we....it doesn't take long when you are with the Marines at Moreshead at at North Carolina you're doing 500 messages a day and doing semaphore and you're doing flashing light and you're running signal flags up and down. This is intense ah practice ya know and pretty soon you get proficient; that's how



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we learned but we did do a lot of self-teaching where we worked together to get more proficient and, uh, one of the incentives was, ah, the Navy was always so arrogant and thought they were so good when we got on the transport we had a Navy chief signalman and Andy came off of battle wagons; he was a battleship sailor and they were very proud and their signal gang were very, very proud people. They constantly tried to beat each other with speed and efficiency and accuracy and Andy insisted that this Coast Guard signal crew was going to be as good as a battle-wagon crew and we worked very hard and we got very good

I remember nights sitting at anchor in the fleet and ah the flag ship would start this 000 business; its an all fleet message and yard arms would flash 000 for about ten minutes and then the the message would come and it went to all ships at once and you had to acknowledge that you received it. Those were really fun days in a way and exciting so you are taking, you're taking it back a long ways --- excuse me.

TRAVIS: That's OK! How did you learn; I mean I don't want to dwell on this but I mean how ah how did you get the training to even pick up the machine guns and go back in there I mean if you had been trained a signalman?

EVANS: Well, ah the same kind of training you get today on a ship I imagine. You learn armament, you go to classes on on various weapons, ah you go to Cape May, New Jersey and fire on the range.

TRAVIS: Did you guys do that?

EVANS: Oh yeah, we spent um with the *Spencer* tied up to the dock at uh Cape May and and we fired on their range in 1940 and its very interesting to fire on a thousand yard range --- have you ever tried that? Yeah, it is very interesting everything is wavering in the heat and you try to get the bull's eye and we fired on the range up here at Woodbee Island or I have but Cape May was a --- was a learning experience and as an officer I always tried to be an expert with the .45 at Astoria, Oregon when I had the buoy tender. The Navy had a little range at the tip of the island and ah I would go over there oh I guess I made three or four trips over there trying to make expert and I come within one point. I never could break into expert with the 4.5. Its a very hard weapon to master, especially a stock .45.

TRAVIS: 1911 A1-0.

EVANS: It is a wicked weapon to handle.

TRAVIS: I ah I've got one and I try and shoot it sometimes but a . . .



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EVANS: No, but the training on the ship was great put us through all that kind of stuff and all the drills.

TRAVIS: I guess he was your best friend.

EVANS: Yeah, I think so coming I had a lot of friends in Blain when I came to Seattle ah in my last two years in high school ah there was one one fellow that I that we kind of palled around a little bit together but we were never close. And ah I don't know it seemed it just happened that we became friends and did everything together went everywhere together went on liberty together ah even took leave together came out here to the West Coast twice together on ha ha riding the bus that was no that was a good deal four days and five nights on a bus.

That was kind of interesting; it was a long ride but it was cheap and that was what we could afford you know and in those days Greyhound would allow you to ah they had three routes across the country: southern route; central route; and northern route. If you bought a roundtrip ticket from New York you could come across the northern route and go back the central route or go back the southern route. We never did anything but the northern route unfortunately but but ah he and I just hit it off together and just were friends. Came home on leave and went skiing in over in Cle Elum together. Uh, I don't know, just on of those natural things it was a pretty sad day for me when he died. You never think about dying even in that situation with the war going on and the bullets flying around you don't really think about it you just do your job and ah I guess you anticipate that you're going to be okay and then one day one of you isn't okay. Its ah, its pretty tough.

TRAVIS: The legend has it that his dying words were asking about the Marines.

EVANS: He wanted to be sure they were gone....off that's the kind of guy he was he --- he wanted to complete things. I think he was the one that pushed us in in teaching ourselves to be good signalmen. He was the pusher perhaps more than I was, he had the energy and he'd get burned out too. He pushed it so hard he'd burn himself out and have to recover but, but ah, that's the way Doug was and he was on that, although we were working together on that he was really the leader in that and ah, I was glad to be with him and back him up.

TRAVIS: What did he say?

EVANS: He said "did they get off?" and that's about all he said. And then he died. I don't think he ever heard me answer him. It was very quick fortunately. Can we talk about something else?



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TRAVIS: Its tough stuff.

EVANS: I knew you were going to bring this up after all that's part of the story but I've never have had as good a friend. Not that close. It was a marvelous time of my life, one I won't forget.

TRAVIS: Pat Sheehan had a picture of this dashing young signalman winning the Navy Cross.

EVANS: Hmm, well yea, that was unexpected. I didn't realize that Dwight Dexter had even applied for an award of any kind until we got back to the States and got to, ah, Alameda, California and they had this ceremony. There is always a funny story attached to everything. Headquarters had mailed the Navy Cross from Headquarters to [Vice] Admiral [Joseph E.] Stika [USCG] who was then the commanding officer of the Coast Guard Training Station Alameda. It didn't arrive so he had his Navy Cross pinned on me in the ceremony and then [he] gave me the bar out of his box that it comes in, [he] gave me the bar to wear and he became a friend. And we visited the admiral, he retired, he lived in Dallas and ah we visited him a couple of times, Dorothy and I, as we were going back and forth across the country. We'd stop in Dallas and he often lamented the fact that we were about the only Coast Guard people of all his Coast Guard friends and associates that ever stopped and see him. They would call him up and say we came through Dallas but ah we didn't have time. You know this is sad --- he was a great guy. Admiral Stika, but ah that was that was a surprise to me.

The other thing that I have to tell you....another interesting anecdote. I came off Guadalcanal with malaria so bad [that] they take me to New Caledonia and they dumped me on Admiral [William F.] Halsey's flagship which was anchored in the middle of Caledonia harbor; that's where he ran the South Pacific from. That was his headquarters. They said it had been sitting there at anchor so long it was aground on coffee grounds ah about the second or third day! I was there; now I'm a first class signalman at this point the second or third day I'm there I'm called down to the office and said ah Admiral Halsey is giving you a field ah ah field promotion to ah chief signalman --- the Coast Guard never heard of a field promotion, never done, that they didn't even know what that was. I'm not sure they were too happy with Admiral Halsey. So the only chief petty officers coat I could find to wear coming back to the States was a carpenter's [mate] so I wore left armed chief carpenter's rate all the way back to the states and khakis until I could get to Treasure Island in San Francisco and buy a uniform. Ha-ha, funny things that happen. Funny things that happen.

TRAVIS: Did he pin it on you himself?



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EVANS: No, no they just they just called me down the office and advised me that he had. . . .

TRAVIS: Did you meet him?

EVANS: I met him but it was very brief --- he was a no nonsense guy. He was a great, great leader.

TRAVIS: Lived up to his nickname? "Bull" Halsey?

EVANS: Oh yeah, absolutely.

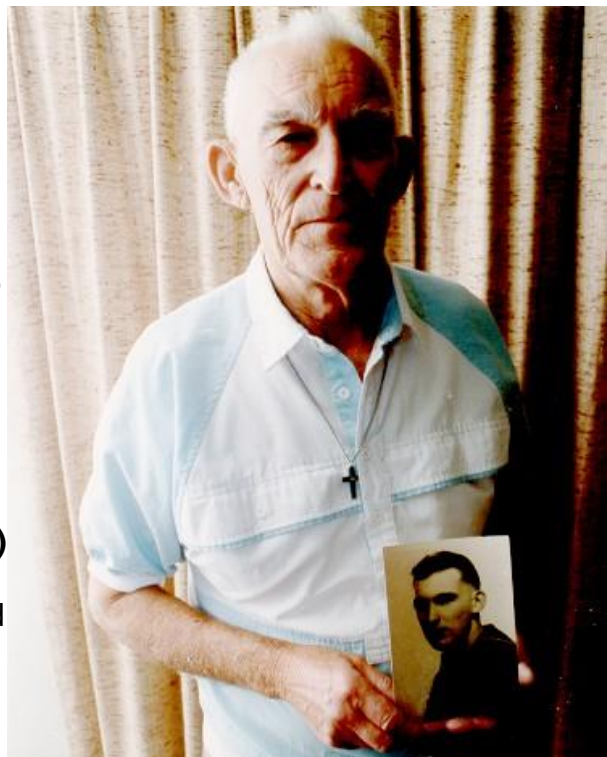
TRAVIS: How did you become an officer?

EVANS: I came back to the states and reported [and then] went on leave. Dorothy and I were married--it was in May and, in fact, Saturday is our anniversary. Went back to San Francisco and they told me that in the meantime Commander Dexter has been recovering; he was very sick when he came back from the South Pacific and he spent a long time in convalescence. Then when he came back to duty he became personnel officer for the Twelfth District.

So I was instructed that the personnel officer in the Twelfth District wanted to see me and I go up there and its my old boss. We greeted each other and talked for a minute and he reached in his desk drawer and pulled out a letter and said I want you to sign this letter -- the Coast Guard needs communications officers and you are a great candidate and so he said I have written a letter recommending you for a temporary commission as an ensign. I had no college; I had nothing, you know. I was just a high school graduate and he convinced me I finally signed the letter.

(Right: CDR Evans in 1992)

I became--I was waiting for reassignment and I heard that the recruiting office in Denver needed a chief petty officer so I requested it. And he called me into his office and said you don't want to go to Denver. I said yes, I can't





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think of a better place to go after the South Pacific to just relax you know so okay, I go to Denver. Dotty and I got a place to stay and rented a little apartment. I'm there for and the officer in charge is a warrant officer named Barnet. We got along just fine he and I.

About six weeks later I get a call from San Francisco from Commander Dexter. I think then he's a, I don't know if he was a captain then or not but anyway, he says I'm sending your commission up by mail and you'll have to have a change of command apparently. Okay, I said what does this entail? Well, he said you will get orders to Yorktown for 90-day "wonder school." He said you will have to go through indoctrination. I said don't send the commission up here I don't want it! He said what do you mean -- I said I'm not going down to Yorktown and going through 90-day wonder school after coming out of the South Pacific -- you can forget it. I don't want the commission -- yes you do and you'll go -- no I won't! He said well we will see about that and we hung up. The commission came but the orders never came. So Barnet and I held a very friendly change of command ceremony and I became his boss and we went right on working together. Then I got transferred to a to a ASW school in Florida to man a frigate and I was in one of the reserve crews so we never got on the frigate and instead I got orders to one of the new General-Class -- I mean the new Admiral-class transports, the big 512-footers, as the U.S.S. *Admiral [William] Capps* [AP-120]. Reported there as an assistant communications officer and when we got to Hollandia, New Guinea ran into Barnet who was a chief engineer on a tug.

TRAVIS: How 'bout that.

EVANS: Small world, small world.

END OF INTERVIEW
