



Niel Blumenstein

Interview with **GM3 Niel Blumenstein, USCGR**

WWII Coast Guard Veteran
USS BURLINGTON (PF-51)

Conducted by **C. Douglas Kroll, Ph. D., U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary**

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Biographical Summary

Born in Salem, Oregon on 1 November 1925, Neil Blumenstein grew up there, with both an older and younger brother, and attended its public schools. Shortly before reaching the age of 18 he dropped out of high school and worked briefly with his father at the local paper mill. He enlisted in the Coast Guard on 28 October 1943 in Seattle, Washington and was sent to recruit training at Government (Coast Guard) Island in Alameda, California. Upon completion of recruit training he was assigned to the USS BURLINGTON (PF-51) as part of the initial crew aboard when it was commissioned on 3 April 1944. The leader of the 11th District Coast Guard Band that played for the commissioning was entertainer Rudy Vallee, then serving in the Coast Guard.

Assigned as a Gunners Mate striker, he became at GM3 aboard and eventually became the gun captain on a twin 40mm anti-aircraft gun and one of the 3" 50 cal. guns. Aboard the ship we worked for GMC Joe Chennault, the half-brother of LTG Claire Chennault of the "Flying Tigers." The BURLINGTON served as an escort vessel in the South Pacific, visiting Espiritu Santo, and performing patrol and escort duties in western New Guinea. While escorting vessels for the invasion of Leyte in the Philippines, the BURLINGTON was attacked by a Japanese kamikaze that he helped shoot down before it could crash into his ship. Late in 1944 they were returning to San Francisco for reassignment in the Aleutian Islands. While crossing the Pacific the BURLINGTON was hit with the December 1944 Pacific Typhoon, taking severe rolls. After being repainted all gray, covering up the camouflage, and reconditioning, the BURLINGTON commenced weather patrols in the Aleutian Islands. While there he got to see World Heavy Weight Boxing Champion Joe Louis referee a boxing match on Adak. In August of 1945, the BURLINGTON was transferred to the Soviet Navy under the Lend-Lease Program. Blumenstein was aboard when the advance party of Soviet Navy officers arrived but detached before the actual transfer of the ship. He was sent to the Coast Guard Base at Port Townsend, Washington for further transfer. After several months he was assigned to the USS POCATELLO (PF-9) and reported aboard the day after LT Buddy Ebsen departed as its Executive Officer. He helped sail it from Washington through the Panama Canal and to Charleston, South Carolina for decommissioning on 2 May 1946. From there he was sent back to Seattle by train and discharged a few weeks later.



After the war Mr. Blumenstein returned to Salem and retook his old job at the paper mill. He met his wife, Dorothy Elizabeth Abbot there and they were married on 10 July 1948 in Salem. He later took a job at the Moore Business Forms plant in Salem, from which he would retire after 37 years of employment. They would have six children: three boys and three girls. The oldest one predeceased him, suffering from MS. His wife died on May 3, 2014. He now lives in a retirement community in Keizer, Oregon.

INTERVIEWER: Where and when were you born?

BLUMENSTEIN: Born in 1925, November the 1st.

INTERVIEWER: And where?

BLUMENSTEIN: Here in Salem [Oregon], at Salem General Hospital.

INTERVIEWER: Would you tell me briefly about your childhood and the high school you graduated from?

BLUMENSTEIN: I went to Garfield Grade School, then I went to Grant Grade School, and then Washington Grade School. I went to Parrish Junior High, then North Salem Senior High School.

INTERVIEWER: What year did you graduate from high school?

BLUMENSTEIN: I didn't graduate. I went in the service. I was held back a year in grade school and I would have turned 18 and been drafted into the Army before I graduated. Rather than that I dropped out of school. My dad was the foreman of the Western Paper Mill here in Salem and he wanted me to come down there and work with him a little bit and teach me a few things before I went in the service, which helped a great deal. I learned how to take orders and do things.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you go to enlist in the Coast Guard?

BLUMENSTEIN: I went to the recruiting office in Portland but I had to go to Seattle to get sworn in.

INTERVIEWER: When was that?

BLUMENSTEIN: October the 28th 1943.

INTERVIEWER: Where did they send you for basic training?

BLUMENSTEIN: They sent us to Alameda, California, to Government Island. Today they call it Coast Guard Island.

INTERVIEWER: How long did recruit training last?

BLUMENSTEIN: I am not sure but it seemed like six months. It was a long time. A lot longer than the Navy, which I think was four months.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of training did you get there?

BLUMENSTEIN: Just basic training.

INTERVIEWER: How to march, how to make your bed and everything else?

BLUMENSTEIN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How was the food at boot camp?

BLUMENSTEIN: The food wasn't bad.

INTERVIEWER: Did the seamanship training equip you fairly well for reporting aboard your first ship?

BLUMENSTEIN: Yes, they were very thorough with that training.

INTERVIEWER: After boot camp what happened to you?

BLUMENSTEIN: We had a choice of what we wanted to be. I wanted to be a Carpenters Mate, or if not that a Machinist Mate and something else after that. The trouble with that is that we had a training class on anti-aircraft fire. They had us use something like a 20mm with a big motion picture screen with planes coming from either side or from the top or bottom. You never knew where it was going to come from. When you fired you could see your tracer arch through the air---it didn't go straight. When you were hitting it [plane on the screen] it would go "beep, beep". I sat there and watched half of them do it and got an idea of what was going on. I happened to get in the right rhythm right from the start and nailed everything that went across the screen. It was a steady "beep." When they got done they shut everything off and turned on the lights. They checked everything over, figuring something was wrong with the machine. Then they told me that I had more than doubled the highest score we've ever had. They asked me what my rating was. I told them I was a Seaman

2/c. They told me I wouldn't be that long. I ended being a striker for Gunners Mate. I never went to school for that, I was just a striker.

INTERVIEWER: After they decided you were going to be a Gunners Mate, where did they send you?

BLUMENSTEIN: They sent us aboard ship.

INTERVIEWER: They sent you to the USS BURLINGTON [PF-51]?

BLUMENSTEIN: Yes. I went aboard in Alameda, California.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember when that was? What time of year?

BLUMENSTEIN: No.

INTERVIEWER: Anything you remember about your first day aboard?

BLUMENSTEIN: There was a Coast Guard guy that ran a band. I can't remember what his name was. His band was there for our commissioning ceremony [3 April 1944]. I was on the commissioning crew.

INTERVIEWER: Was the band leader Rudy Vallee?

BLUMENSTEIN: Yes, it was.

INTERVIEWER: Was LCDR Edgar Carlson your commanding officer?

BLUMENSTEIN: Yes. When we first went aboard ship there was all kind of room. That's when they had your parents and all family there and they could come aboard and see what their son was going to live in. After that they hauled the ship back to the shipyard. The bunks were originally two-high and at the shipyard they made them all three-high. They crammed more in there and it made for pretty tight quarters.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any celebrities on the BURLINGTON?

BLUMENSTEIN: My supervisor on the BURLINGTON was Chief Gunners Mate Joe Chennault. He was the half-brother of General [LTG] Claire Chennault [of the "Flying Tigers"]. He used to get letters from his brother all the time.

INTERVIEWER: What was Joe like?

BLUMENSTEIN: I liked him. He was the reason I became a Gunners Mate. When I graduated from boot camp I was a Seaman 1/c for one month. When we left San Francisco a 2nd Class Gunners Mate didn't show up. He jumped ship. That left a rate opening. There were two of us who were qualified. The other kid had been a Seaman 1/c for a year so they were going to give both of us a test. Whoever passed with the highest score got the rating. Joe Chennault didn't like this other kid. He gave me a paper and told me if I studied it I would "ace" the test. I think I could have passed it anyhow. He wanted to make sure that the other kid didn't get the rating.

INTERVIEWER: How long after the shipyard did you sail out into the Pacific?

BLUMENSTEIN: It wasn't too long. First they sent us to Gunnery school at Point Montera out of San Francisco, before we actually fired our anti-aircraft guns.

INTERVIEWER: Which gun mount were you assigned to?

BLUMENSTEIN: I was assigned to a twin 40mm. I was a pointer on it and then later on was the gun captain on that one and also gun captain on a 3-inch [50 Cal.]. I specialized on the 40mm and knew that one inside

and out. Then we went to another anti-aircraft training out of San Diego. That's where we did our shakedown cruise.

During this training was the only time we dropped our depth charges. We had the tear-drop depth charges, fired from "I" guns. They were supposed to go down faster; that was the theory on them. We also had two depth charge racks on the stern. During training we dropped all of them, set for 50 feet down. When they went off we cracked decks and broke steam lines. If there were any weak points on the ship, we found out about it.

The bow of the ship had a really sharp point and they had poured tons of concrete down it. It was designed to ram a sub with it. The ships were built for England as Corvettes, but England turned them down. The [U.S.] Navy didn't want them so somebody got the bright idea to give them to the Coast Guard.

We also practiced with our Hedgehog [Anti-Submarine Projector]. There were 24 in a battery. There was a submarine towing an orange "water bomb" so that we could see it but the "sound jockeys" could not. They were enclosed and couldn't see anything outside. They would pick up this submarine sound and guide us to it. When they fired the Hedgehog battery we could see how close they came to the target. They would shout 24 out at the same time. They would go "boom, boom, boom, boom." They would go in a big pattern. They all hit the water at the same time. Each one had a little propeller that turned so many revolutions and dropped a detonator down on three ball bearings. And then if it just touched a sub it jars those bearings apart and it drops down and detonator goes off and there is a granulated TNT that explodes and the main charge is cast TNT, just like the depth charges had. It was actually several explosions that would happen on that. Any one of them could sink a sub and you have 24 of them going off in a pattern.

We also had some torpedo bombers, TBF Avengers, coming in from both sides of the ship. One would go this way and one would go that way (gestures with hands). I was tracking them with a 40mm and he would one way repeatedly and then suddenly went the other way. When he did that, the two of them collided head on; right over our heads. Of course the ship was moving so they didn't land on our ship. As soon as the planes hit the water they disappeared.

INTERVIEWER: Did you rescue the pilots?

BLUMENSTEIN: No. They were both killed instantly. They didn't have a chance. Luckily there was just the pilot in each plane. Normally they also carried a gunner in the back. Just the two pilots were lost.

Then we were going a little too fast when we lowered a whale boat to see if anything survived. The front davits slipped and it let the bow go down before the stern. It dug into the water. I turned around and turned over. It was back behind me on one side. I saw the big old metal davits crumble. The whale boat dove down in the water with all these guys in there, including the Executive Officer. They were thrown out of the boat into the ocean. The Executive Officer got his leg caught in the line and was being dragged along beside the ship. Finally somebody cut him loose.

INTERVIEWER: Did the ship pick up all those thrown in the water from the whale boat?

BLUMENSTEIN: Yes. There were crash boats from San Diego out there during shakedown and they were racing to pick up all the men. They also towed our upside down whale boat back to us and we just tied it off to the stern. We came back into San Diego dragging that whaleboat behind us.

INTERVIEWER: It sounds like it was an exciting shakedown training.

BLUMENSTEIN: It was.

INTERVIEWER: About how long did that last?

BLUMENSTEIN: About a week.

INTERVIEWER: When you finished in San Diego, what did your ship do then?

BLUMENSTEIN: We went to San Pedro, California and that's where they supplied the ship with everything. We left out of there for the South Pacific. It took us 30 days to get there.

INTERVIEWER: Where was the first island you visited?

BLUMENSTEIN: It was Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides Islands.

INTERVIEWER: What was a typical day like for you on the ship, as a Gunners Mate, sailing there? Did you stand watches as a Gunners Mate?

BLUMENSTEIN: Yes, a four-hour watch at a gun mount.

INTERVIEWER: How was the food on the ship?

BLUMENSTEIN: It was pretty good. Unfortunately almost all the food we had was dehydrated. Powdered milk was horrible. They did carry fresh fruit like oranges and apples, which helped.

Espiritu Santo was our first anchorage and we had our first anchor pool. Crewmembers picked the minute we would be officially anchored and afterwards would look in the log to see what winning minute was. I won the first one.

At the time we had a guy on an anti-aircraft gun mount was scared to death. We had to almost drag to the gun mount. We shouldn't have even taken him on the ship. While we were heading to Espiritu Santo guys got to talking about what could happen in battle. This guy lost it. He ended up in a straight jacket, strapped down in a bunk. He had to have a watch on him around the clock. A crewman would have four hours with him. I had that watch once and he would holler and cry and laugh and try to punch anything around him. He got his arm loose once time and he was so strong that it took about four of us to get his arm back down and strapped in again. After we go to our first port they took him off the ship and shipped him back to that states for discharge. He just couldn't handle it.

One time we had a guy who had an epileptic fit on the ship and it ended up they sent him back home. After that there were three black guys on there that tried to fake an epileptic fit so that they could get out of the service. It didn't work.

INTERVIEWER: How many blacks were aboard the ship?

BLUMENSTEIN: I think there were six or seven. Most of them were stewards in the wardroom and one or two in the engine room.

INTERVIEWER: Any other minorities on the ship?

BLUMENSTEIN: I don't remember any.

INTERVIEWER: How did the black Coast Guardsmen get along with the rest of the crew?

BLUMENSTEIN: We never had any trouble with them.

INTERVIEWER: What was the relationship between the enlisted crew and the chief and officers?

BLUMENSTEIN: They were pretty good. Everybody got along well. They were a pretty good bunch of guys.

INTERVIEWER: What were the officers like? Any Academy graduates? Any reserves?

BLUMENSTEIN: We had a little bit of both. We called the reserve officers "90- day wonders." I didn't notice that much difference between the Academy grads and the reserve officers.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do after you anchored at Espiritu Santo?

BLUMENSTEIN: We got to go ashore. I remember there was a coconut plantation there. We had to walk a trail that went through that and came out into a place where there was a blue lagoon. It was the most beautiful setting I have ever seen. The water was powder blue and a coral reef so that sharks couldn't get in.

INTERVIEWER: Was there liberty call at that coconut plantation?

BLUMENSTEIN: A lot of the crew brought coconuts back to the ship.

INTERVIEWER: Did you see any other service members there?

BLUMENSTEIN: Yes, there were Navy people there.

INTERVIEWER: How was the Navy – Coast Guard relationship?

BLUMENSTEIN: We never had any problems.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever have any contact with foreign navy personnel?

BLUMENSTEIN: We had some with the British. I never did like the British. I don't know why. The ships they had they didn't keep up like the U.S. Navy kept theirs. Maybe that effected how I felt about them. I was only involved with one British ship and it was in New Guinea.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you go after Espiritu Santo?

BLUMENSTEIN: We went to Melanie Bay, New Guinea, right on the tip of New Guinea. We went through a coral reef—a narrow slot cut through the reef. It was a small bay and there was a [Japanese] landing barge still in there on the beach. I had a friend on the USS HAMMANN [DD-412], a destroyer. They were the ones that went in there and sank three ships. That battle had been over for a while and they had set up a fire fighting school there, which I went to. We had one in boot camp and we had almost the same thing again here. There were no docks or anything like that in this harbor.

There were a number of natives here and they all wanted to trade items to get our bottled beer. They didn't know what money was. Some also liked white cloth so I would go to rag bag we had for cleaning guns and trade them off for items.

INTERVIEWER: Where did your ship go after that?

BLUMENSTEIN: After that we went up to Wewak, New Guinea. That was the last place Amelia Earhart took off from when her plane disappeared. We went there a couple of other small places on the coast and we ended up at Hollandia, New Guinea, which I think they called Humboldt Bay. That is where they made up all the convoys for the different invasions in the Philippines. When we went in there it has just been taken. It was a real clean bay. But after hundreds to U.S. ships in this pretty good sized bay and after all their sewage is dumped in there for a while it looked more like a cesspool. It was terrible.

INTERVIEWER: Were you made part of any convoys while you were there?

BLUMENSTEIN: Yes, that's all we did was to escort convoys. We went to the invasion of Morotai, a small island that they ended up making a PT boat basin.

One of our escort jobs that we had was escorting forty PT boats and two PT tenders from New Guinea to the Philippines. Those PT boats had three engines in them. They could muffle their exhaust down in the water to keep quiet or they could open it up and shoot straight pipes, with no muffler at all! When you have forty PT boats with three of those big engines roaring out of there at high speed it put the Indianapolis Road Races to shame. It was as if you took and dropped a hand full of "bbs" and they scattered everywhere. That is what the

PT boats called the scatter movement. When they are going full steam that arch that comes out behind their stern was about 300 feet behind them. I got to go aboard one of them. It was pretty tight quarters. They had two squadrons. One was all green and other was camouflage.

Then we went to Leyte, part of the invasion of Leyte. That was in October and then in November we went back into Leyte again and we ran into more action this second time than we did the first. They convoy had sent all the guys ashore and that evening twenty-four [Japanese] kamikazes came in there and started diving on everything. We were trying to shoot them down. There were four P-38s up there trying to shoot them down, too. They stayed on the tail of each other so that we could tell who they were. If we started shooting in their area they would flip on their sides so that we could see their twin fuselage.

INTERVIEWER: You were firing at the kamikazes?

BLUMENSTEIN: Yes. I was on the 40mm mount. We had one that was diving at us from the stern at a 45 degree angle, diving right straight at me. Our 3" 50 cal. got a burst right underneath him and flipped him up on his side. With my 40mm I cut him in two! He hit the water in two pieces. If the 3" 50 cal. hadn't hit him, even if I had hit him, he still would have probably hit me. I thought I was dead. It scared the heck out of me. Shot down two possible and had one assist. That is what we were given credit for.

While all of this was happening, there was a merchant ship that had 50 gallon drums of high octane fuel on its deck. A kamikaze plane flew down into it and blew it up. That was the biggest explosion I have ever seen. It looked like the world was blowing up. There was a huge smoke circle cloud that went up above it. We went over there and gave them some first aid. That plane that dove on them was still on their deck.

The afternoon before this happened, we were at anchor and all of a sudden I heard a "boom" and jumped up under a 3" 50 Cal. and hid my head and almost knocked myself out. I looked over and this kamikaze dove in the forward hold of ship that that Army was unloading. A second one dived down and I think he chickened out and just dropped his bomb instead of diving his plane in. His bomb missed the ship by about twenty feet.

When he did that, I guess he lost face so he flew up high and did a big barrel roll and dove in the bay. Nobody was even shooting at him then.



INTERVIEWER: Was that your biggest combat of the war, during the invasion of the Philippines?

BLUMENSTEIN: Yes. We were lucky. That second time, after the kamikaze tried to dive on us, when we left later that evening is when the Japanese fleet came down through the Surigao Strait. We missed them by about a hundred miles. If we had left a little later we would have run right into them and that was the biggest battle of the whole war in the Pacific. We just barely got out of that.

When we were leaving there was a plane that dove down and dropped a bomb or dove into a mine sweeper that was astern of us and sank it. We left. I never did know what happened to them. But the next day, we used to listen to "Tokyo Rose" and she said that they sank "The Burly Bee" today. That was our big insignia on the side of our ship. The Walt Disney people had painted this big bee diving with a gun snout on him and carrying a couple of depth charges. It said "Burly Bee" underneath it. When "Tokyo Rose" said that, they

made us paint it over. We had to cover it over with gray paint. They didn't want anything that would identify the ship. We all got a big laugh out of that.

While we were in the South Pacific, Captain Carlson was reassigned to another Patrol Frigate that was having all sorts of problems, to try and straighten it out. He was a pretty good. Our executive officer, LT Cook, was an excellent seaman. Whenever we went to dock the ship he never had any trouble. Sometimes there would be a Navy ship trying to tie up in a cross current or something and they were all over the harbor. We'd stand off until the Navy ship finally got tied up and then he would go in, spin it around and back it in and all lines were secured. That was all there was to it. Cook would be our Commanding Officer the rest of the time I was aboard the ship.

INTERVIEWER: How did you feel about the people you were fighting, the Japanese? Animosity, hatred, respect?

BLUMENSTEIN: No. I figured we were all about the same.

INTERVIEWER: When you sailed out of the Philippines, where did you go?

BLUMENSTEIN: We went to Hollandia and then to the Admiralty Islands and then we headed back to the states. On the voyage back, two or three days after we left the Admiralty Islands, we were in that big storm [December 1944 Pacific Typhoon]. It was rated as the worst storm that they ever had in the South Pacific. I remember it lasted at least three days for more. We were doing 45-degree rolls in that thing. That same storm turned over three destroyers and sank them with all hands. It was really bad.

INTERVIEWER: According to the records the BURLINGTON got back to San Francisco in December of 1944, is that correct?

BLUMENSTEIN: Yes, it was on Christmas morning. We went to Pearl Harbor for three days on our way to San Francisco. We never even got to go ashore in Hawaii. We went right by where the [USS] ARIZONA was on Ford Island and as we passed by we could see the oil still coming up.

We picked up another convoy there to escort back to the states. As we were leaving we ran into a [Japanese] sub out there and we chased it around, trying to get it, but our convoy was getting away from us so we said "forget it" and left it and rejoined our convoy. The next convoy that came by did sink that submarine. Everybody on the ship that sank it got a Silver Star.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do when you arrived in San Francisco?

BLUMENSTEIN: We anchored out for the first few days. I think they were afraid we might jump ship.

INTERVIEWER: Did they eventually grant you liberty there?

BLUMENSTEIN: Yes, we tied up and were there for over a month while they reconditioned the ship. They repainted the ship, taking the camouflage off and painted it all gray. We were going to the Aleutians [Islands] for weather patrols. We had some Navy guys on board for weather observation. We had both sides of the ship lined up with acetylene tanks full of helium. They had these great big, huge balloons that they would fill up [with helium] and then they took a box kite and covered it with foil which would fly off from the balloon, so they could track it with the radar.

INTERVIEWER: Were those the only Navy people on your ship?

BLUMENSTEIN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: So you did weather patrols in the Bering Sea off Alaska?

BLUMENSTEIN: Yes, thirty days on and three days in. Thirty days out and three days in.

INTERVIEWER: Where would you come into port for those three days?

BLUMENSTEIN: Adak and sometimes it was Attu. When we first went to the Aleutians we stopped at Dutch Harbor; then we went to Adak; then we went to Attu. Most of our time we were out of Adak. When we got up in that cold weather, the ship tightens up and we cracked a couple of plates that filled a cofferdam up and we had to go into dry dock in the Finger Bay at Adak. We had to do all the work. Back in the states when we were in dry dock the ship yard did everything. Here we had to get down with steel buffers and clean the whole bottom of the ship. It was all repainted. While we were in the dry dock there was a Navy auxiliary fuel tanker in there. It usually hauled aviation gas. They were pumping out the bilges and they are getting ready to do something. Some guy broke out an acetylene torch and all those fumes, all through there, burst into flame with a big explosion. I think nine guys in the dry dock offices along the ship were killed. This all happened on the day that President Roosevelt died [12 April 1945]. That happened just before this happened.

INTERVIEWER: It was a sad day all around.

BLUMENSTEIN: It was. Me and another guy found the last two bodies of those killed. One big guy was laying on top of a smaller guy. They had been in the head and when they opened the door the fire and explosion probably killed them pretty fast. I still remember that. I tell you, burnt human flesh; you cannot get that out of your nostrils. It just sticks with you.

INTERVIEWER: Any damage to the BURLINGTON in that fire?

BLUMENSTEIN: No. The whole front of the dry dock was on fire and we had fire hoses and everything on her. We were keeping it wet down. They were trying to sink the dry dock as fast as they could, but takes a while.

While in Adak I also got to see [World Heavy Weight Boxing Champion] Joe Louis. He came on a publicity tour to referee a boxing match among members of our crew and other Coast Guardsmen or sailors.

INTERVIEWER: Did you get to meet him or speak with him?

BLUMENSTEIN: No, he always had four, very large men around him. I was able to only get within three feet of him. He didn't say much. His hands were huge, about the size of a picnic ham.

INTERVIEWER: After you got repaired in Finger Bay did you go back on weather patrol?

BLUMENSTEIN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: For a couple of more months?

BLUMENSTEIN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: After that did you go to Tacoma, Washington?

BLUMENSTEIN: No. I went there after I finally left the ship.

INTERVIEWER: While you were in Alaskan waters aboard the BURLINGTON, did you find out that they were going to turn the ship over to the Soviet Navy?

BLUMENSTEIN: I was there when the Russians first came aboard. There were a few officers who came aboard to look over the ship. Before we turned it over to the Russians they took the radar off; they took the sound gear off; they took the forward twin 40mm guns off and they put the mount for a single 40mm gun which is nothing like a twin 40mm gun. The twin 40mm was a pretty sophisticated anti-aircraft gun. When they came back aboard and saw that the 40mm guns were off they were mad, they didn't like it. (laughter)

INTERVIEWER: So it was just the Soviet officers that came aboard to check the ship out while you were still aboard?

BLUMENSTEIN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: About how many Soviet Navy officers were there?

BLUMENSTEIN: Five or six of them.

INTERVIEWER: Was there any kind of ceremony when they turned it over?

BLUMENSTEIN: I don't know. I wasn't there when they turned it over. I had already transferred off. I was transferred to Port Townsend, Washington to the Coast Guard Base there.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do while you were there?

BLUMENSTEIN: We all were given jobs. They put me in charge of the ordinance department. We got liberty there. We got 24 on and 48 off. I hitchhiked home on every 48 hour liberty. I didn't have that far to go. I'd hitchhike home and take the train back in the evening. It would leave Salem about 6 o'clock in the evening. I'd sleep while I was on the train and by the time I got to Seattle I had just enough time to catch the ferry to Port Townsend. I had been doing this for a while and then there was one time, I can't remember what happened, whether the train was late or the taxi was late, but I missed the ferry. I had to wait another day, or quite a few hours, to catch the next ferry. When I didn't show up, they already had me assigned for an LST. I didn't show up so they put someone else on it. When I got back I didn't get in trouble or anything. The guy that got assigned to the LST was a little upset. I thought they would probably change us back and put me on it, but they didn't. They left him on it and I got to stay there for several months more. Then they put me on the [USS] POCATELLO [PF-9]. Buddy Ebsen was the Executive Officer. All they ever did was weather patrols out of Seattle. I was the senior Gunners Mate and it was pretty easy duty but then the war was over.

INTERVIEWER: Did you get to meet Buddy Ebsen?

BLUMENSTEIN: No, he left the day before I reported aboard. There wasn't room for both of us. (laughter)

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember what month you got to the POCATELLO?

BLUMENSTEIN: Probably about July of 1945.

INTERVIEWER: What did the POCATELLO do while you were aboard.

BLUMENSTEIN: They were going to sail it to Charleston, South Carolina to decommission it. We had to go down through the Panama Canal. We stopped at Colon on the other end. We were there several days. I did Shore Patrol there. I did Shore Patrol in Port Townsend, too. I remember that there was a Navy ship there with a lot of "boots" [new sailors] on it. Usually sailors would give you a bad time as Shore Patrol in you were in the Coast Guard. But I had enough battle ribbons, that when they looked at them and asked me "Where the heck have you been? We never knew the Coast Guard ever did anything" they didn't give me any problems. Interviewer. After Colon where did you sail? Did you stop anywhere on your way to Charleston?

BLUMENSTEIN: No. But we did stop somewhere beyond Cuba. There was a merchant ship that had lost a propeller. We had to take them under tow and tow them into Charleston.

INTERVIEWER: Were you discharged in Charleston?

BLUMENSTEIN: No they sent me back to Seattle. I took a train from Charleston. We stopped in Chicago for a while, because we had to change train stations. We took a taxi across town. I had never ridden on a subway so I stopped and rode a couple of blocks on the subway.

INTERVIEWER: So you were discharged in Seattle. What month were you discharged?

BLUMENSTEIN: May of 1946.

INTERVIEWER: Did you just take a train back here to Salem?

BLUMENSTEIN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Anything I missed?

BLUMENSTEIN: No.

INTERVIEWER: What was most memorable?

BLUMENSTEIN: The invasion of the Philippines when we were hit by the kamikaze.

INTERVIEWER: What would you like future generations to know about your service in the Coast Guard during World War II?

BLUMENSTEIN: I wouldn't trade my experience for anything.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think about today's Coast Guard?

BLUMENSTEIN: If I had to go in the service again I'd go back in the Coast Guard. It's a good service. Why I did is nothing like they have now. It is harder to get in than the Navy. They have a harder physical. Even when I went in it was harder to get into than the Navy. A lot of guys couldn't get into it that wanted to it.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you for sharing your memories.

END OF INTERVIEW

