

Interview with
CRESENCIO VELASQUEZ

February 12, 2019

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CRESENCIO VELASQUEZ

Content Warning: Contains words that are inherently offensive, insensitive and harmful.

Cresencio Velasquez was interviewed on February 5, 2019 by Randall J. Bunn at the Southern Utah Veterans Home in Ivins, Washington County, Utah. He related his military experiences.

RB: I want to talk [with you] about some of your military experiences, his life before he got in and his life after he was [discharged]. Where and when were you born?

CV: [I was born] in Pharr, Texas, January 15, 1943.

RB: Your parents were not living in Pharr, Texas at the time. Where were they living?

CV: They were living in Port Clinton, Ohio.

RB: Portland?

CV: Port Clinton.

RB: Did your father [Cresencio Velasquez] serve in World War II?

CV: Yes. He was in [General George Smith] Patton's Third Army.

RB: Very good. Your father was in the military and your mother [Vicenta Castillo] was pregnant with you, what did she decide to do?

CV: She decided she wasn't going to have a baby in Ohio, right on Lake Erie, in January. So she went down to Texas and that is where I was born.

RB: In Pharr, Texas, you said?

CV: Yes. It is spelled P-H-A-R-R.

RB: Was that where her family was from?

CV: No, her family was from other parts of Texas, but that is where they lived at that time.

RB: Tell a little bit about your growing up experience as a child.

CV: I don't know how I survived! It was cold!

RB: [Laughter] Yes, I bet!

CV: It was so cold! As a [youngster] it didn't matter to [me]. [We] didn't know] it was cold]!

RB: You didn't know anything different.

CV: No. My friends in the neighborhood would say, "Come on, let's go play hockey down on the river." "Okay." So we would get about twenty [fellows], meet, choose up sides and play hockey on the river. When you skate on ice, you shave it. After awhile the ice will melt, you fall down and your clothes will get all wet.

RB: [Laughter]

CV: It didn't matter to me. I still skated, still having fun, then one would say, "I have to get home. I have an hour to do the chores and I need to warm up before I start the chores." It was a little country community. I [would] go home and my mother [would] look at me and say, "Go take a shower." "I took a shower this morning." "Go take a shower!" "Ma!" "Go take a shower!" So I [would] go take a shower. Afterwards, I said, "Mom, why did you have me take a shower?" She said, "Your lips were purple."

RB: [Laughter]

CV: I said, "They were?" She said, "Yes." I said, "Okay." I knew then why she had me take a shower.

RB: It would warm your body up a little. What was the town that you were living in when you grew up?

CV: Gilboa [Putnam County, Ohio], little farm community in northwestern Ohio. Northwestern Ohio is full of those little farm communities.

RB: Yes. Your dad came from the war. Was he still working in agriculture?

CV: Yes.

RB: You said he was a foreman.

CV: Yes, he was bilingual. The man who owned the peach and apple [orchard] had six Mexican families and six Black families [working for him]. My dad could speak to both of them. So the man hired him and that is what he did.

RB: You were living around people who worked in agriculture while growing up?

CV: Yes.

RB: [Did] you have eight brothers and sisters? You are the oldest? [Oscar, Valde, Joe, Velia, Erma, Rick, Emily, Danielle]

CV: Correct.

RB: How was that with a big family? How did you get along in a big family?

CV: It was alright.

RB: Did you all get along?

CV: Yes, yes. That isn't to say that we didn't fight once in awhile

RB: Yes. What was school like when you were growing up?

CV: School was okay. Like any other [youngsters], come recess time we would all go out and play in the snow, get all wet. When we came back [in], we would put our gloves on the steam heaters. Remember those?

RB: Yes.

CV: You would put your gloves on there, they would sizzle and dry. After they dried, you would put them in your pocket. That was in the wintertime. We were right on Lake Erie. That was really nice. In the summertime we would go down to the lake. A couple of us [would] chuck our clothes and dove in the water. After that we always had somebody [who] would keep an eye on [the] time. We told them to give us fifteen minutes. When time was up, we would get upon the bank, air dry, get dressed and go back to school.

RB: [Laughter] That is great! You went to Pandora-Gilboa High School?

CV: Yes.

RB: What was high school like?

CV: We didn't have a big high school. We had thirty-one [students] in the senior class.

RB: Small.

CV: Yes, thirty-one [students], sixteen girls and fifteen boys. Yes, that was right.

RB: [It] was pretty evenly divided. Did you have any favorite subjects in school?

CV: History. I really liked history. I have always liked history. We had a good baseball team, good football team, basketball team and a good track team.

RB: Did you play sports in high school?

CV: Oh, yes! I played football, baseball and track.

RB: What did you do [in] track?

CV: I usually ran the half-mile relay, 100 yard dash and the broad jump.

RB: Did you remember your best time in the 100 yard dash?

CV: Sure! My best time ever was 9:06.

RB: Oh, man! That is really good! I ran track in school, but I never ran that fast. My brother was a track star. I think he got under 10. I remember that was really something! Good! What [position] did you play in football?

CV: I played halfback in football.

RB: Were you a big [youngster]?

CV: No, [when] I graduated from high school, I weighed 125 pounds. I was really terribly light.

RB: Yes.

CV: They called us the “pony back field” because we were small, but fast. The quarterback, the halfbacks — all three of us weighed 125 pounds each. The fullback weighed 160 pounds.

RB: But you were fast!

CV: Yes!

RB: Did you date in high school? Did you have any girlfriends?

CV: Yes, I had a couple of girlfriends, but I didn’t date that much. Just usually on Fridays or Saturdays, which was the norm in those days.

RB: What would you do when you went out?

CV: Usually go out to a movie and then to Big Boy for a hamburger. Each state has different names. In Ohio they called it Frisch’s [Big Boy]. In California they called it, I can’t remember [Bob’s Big Boy]. In Maryland they called it Marino’s. Each state has a different name for Big Boy hamburgers.

RB: It was Frisch's. How do you spell that?

CV: No, Frisch's.

RB: Oh, Frisch's. F-R-I-S-C-H.

CV: A F-R-I-S-C-H-S.

RB: Okay. You graduated from high school in 1962?

CV: Yes.

RB: [Did you] go off to college at that point?

CV: No, I went to work.

RB: Yes, you went to college later. You went to work. What did you do?

CV: I went to work in a photo studio as a processing expert. That is what they called me, anyway.

RB: You would develop the film?

CV: Yes, I developed all the film. Photographers liked it because I did a process called pre-soaking which allowed the chemicals to get to the negative quicker. It had less grain and they really liked that. I kept the wet-time down to a minimum.

RB: How did you learn that?

CV: I learned it in high school. I had a teacher who was a [very] good photographer. He started me on that process.

RB: That ended up being a big part of your career.

CV: A big part of my life. One of the photographers in the studio [said] to his boss, "Look at this. boss." This is [a photo before Chris started working here and the boss looked at it and said, "There is very little grain in this." He said, "Yes. I don't know how he does it. You better give him more money and keep him."

RB: [Laughter]

CV: So he gave me a raise. I was a young [student] and money didn't matter that much to me. As long as I had \$20.00 for a date.

RB: Sure. How much did you earn per hour?

CV: I started out at \$65.00 a week. He gave me a \$10.00 raise so I went to \$75.00 a week.

RB: Very good.

CV: For a “wet nose” [young boy] that was a lot of money.

RB: In 1962 that was a lot of money. How long did you work there before you —.

CV: I worked there three months. Then I told the boss, “I am going to go in the [United States] Navy.” “You are?” I said, “Yes, sir.” He said, “Well, I hate to lose you, but okay.” It was — the word slips my mind right now. But when you went into [military] service, when you came out you were guaranteed the same job.

RB: That is right.

CV: He said, “You can have the same job when you come back.” I said “Okay.”

RB: You never really came back. [Laughter]

CV: No, I stayed in the Navy.

RB: You graduated in June or late spring and worked through the summer. Was it the fall of 1962 [when] you joined the Navy?

CV: In September of 1962 I joined the Navy. The boot-camp pusher [recruiter] said to me, “Do you speak Spanish, Velasquez?” I said, “Yes, sir.” He said, “Can you write it?” “Yes.” “Can you read it?” “Yes.” Go down to personnel and check out that notice on door. I went down there and they were asking for Spanish speaking volunteers. I thought: why not, I will do it. So I signed my name and gave my home address. I was on a date and came home about 11:30 p.m. I noticed the light in the kitchen was still on. I thought: what the heck is mom doing up? I went in. [I said], “Mom, what is the matter?” “A Navy officer called for you today.” “He did?” [She said] “Yes, he said he would call tomorrow at 10:00 in the morning.” “Okay.” The next morning I got up, showered, shaved, dressed and was ready when the telephone rang. I answered it. He said, “Velasquez?” I said, “Yes, sir.” He said “This is commander such-and-such. You remember that you volunteered for the Spanish speaking job?” [I replied,] “Yes, sir.” [He said] “Go out to the armory in Columbus [Ohio] and they will tell you what to do.” [I said,] “Okay.”

The next day my brother took me down to the armory in Columbus. There were eight or nine Hispanic sailors drilling. I got my boots, my fatigues and put them on and joined the drilling. For four days we drilled and during the four days our number grew from ten to about twenty sailors. One morning they had trashcan reveille on us.

RB: Trashcan reveille? What was that?

CV: You know those aluminum trashcans?

RB: Yes.

CV: They take a baton to inside of the corrugated trashcans. Makes that awful sound in the middle of the night!

RB: Did it wake you up?

CV: Oh, yes! You jump up, "What is going on?" "You have thirty minutes. sailors, to get dressed. There is a bus waiting outside." "Can I take a shower?" "You have twenty-nine minutes!" "Okay." So I ran and took a wake-up shower, dried off, got dressed. I didn't even get completely dressed. I just put my underwear and pants on and went out to the bus. Put on my shirt, then my socks and slipped into my shoes. I was dressed. They took us out to the airfield. We got into a C-141 and we took off.

RB: Wow!

CV: You know how it is in the military with rumors.

RB: Yes.

CV: I wondered where we were going. "Oh, we have to be going down to South America." "I bet we are going to go work in the embassies." "That's cool!" That would be nice." We all accepted that as gospel. Pretty soon we started to descend. You could hear the engines cutting back. Soon you feel that thump when [the airplane] lands. The airplane comes to a stop. The back ramp comes down and [someone] says, "Okay, pick up your sea bags on your way out." We had those short seat bags, only about a foot and a half tall. Same order you got in [the airplane, was] the same order you went out. You picked up the next bag and that was your bag. We got off the ramp and I said, "Hey, chief, where are we at?" "You are in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, son." "I think you made a mistake, chief. I think we were supposed to go to Mexico."

RB: [Laughter]

CV: He said, "You get over those [thoughts] that you are going to Mexico. They paired us up with a non-Spanish speaking [United States] Marine. That was all we needed to walk around and listen to what the workers were saying. That was our job, to make sure they weren't doing any planning against us or anything.

RB: This is the fall of 1962.

CV: This was in October.

RB: [During] the Cuban Missile Crisis?

CV: Yes.

RB: Were you there as a part of that?

CV: Yes.

RB: That was the whole thing — you could listen and see if there was some planning.

CV: There wasn't [any] planning against us or anything.

RB: Wow! That was pretty interesting!

CV: Yes. That was what we did all day long. They said, "You just go where your Marine partner goes. Do whatever he does." "Okay." The first day we stood watch together. We [were] at the [Navy] Exchange. That was air conditioned all day long. Guantanamo Bay is hot and muggy. The second day we had a perimeter watch. We started going up a ladder cut out of one-by-three [lumber]. [As] you go up the ladder, these Cubans [children] sat behind the bushes and they would just stare at you. You had a ten-foot chain-link fence with razor wire on the top. As soon as you get past that, the [children] would start throwing rocks at you. We got behind the ladder and if [a rock] was coming for your head, you ducked around the ladder. It would hit the ladder and bounce off. If it hit me in the head, it would have knocked me off the ladder.

RB: Yes, oh gosh.

CV: We couldn't figure out why [they had chicken wire on the fence] when we stood on the tower. They had chain-link fence, three or four strands of chicken wire on there. The reason they had that was to stop the rocks.

RB: That makes sense.

CV: We got up there and the [children] were cussing at us. We didn't say anything. We just let them rant and rave.

RB: In Spanish, right?

CV: Of course!

RB: [Laughter]

CV: We finished our four-hour watch. I said to my partner, “Let’s go down to the air strip.” “Okay.” The driver of the pickup that picked us up took us down to the airstrip. I befriended one of the [United States] Air Force [fellows], and said to him “Pick me up two Wham-os [sling shot] and all the marbles you can get.”

RB: [Laughter] Okay!

CV: He said, “Okay!” I said, “If you have to pay some extra, don’t worry, I will pay you.” “Okay.” So he got me a box of marbles and two Wham-os.

RB: What is a Wham-o?

CV: A slingshot. [Inaudible] You never saw one when you were a [youngster]?

RB: No, I don’t think so. I don’t remember.

CV: They had this tubular [handle], I don’t know what you call them, but at the end of the tubular part there was a little pouch and that was where you put your rock. We put marbles in there. The Wham-o had an aluminum bar that went up to the arm around like this [gesturing to show how the slingshot could be held], so you didn’t have to hold it. You just pulled it up like this.

RB: Yes.

CV: The tubular bar would keep that — you could slingshot in place. I told my friend, “As soon as those [children] come up, just before we clear the chain-link fence, take a pouch of marbles and put the small ones in your mouth. The big agate ones, put in your pocket. Just before we clear, take a marble and put it in the pouch and rear that sucker back. When that [youngster] start throwing rocks at us, shoot them with your Wham-o!” “Okay!”

RB: [Laughter]

CV: We were going up the ladder, and sure enough, the [youngsters] came up. Just before we cleared, I took a marble and put it in that pouch, and reared that sucker back and was ready. One of the [fellows] saw that and he knew what we were going to do. So he ducked behind a bush, but he left about this much of his forehead exposed [gesturing with his hand showing how about three inches was exposed]. I was pretty good with a slingshot. I would knock birds [out] of trees and off telephone and electric wires. I hit that [youngster] and down he went!

RB: Oh, man!

CV: His buddy tried to get him up. I put another marble in, I reared that sucker back and got him just above the ear.

RB: Oh! [Laughter]

CV: A [fellow] saw that, threw his rock down and took off. I got him behind the head.

RB: Holy cow! That is great!

CV: It was great! We are about to have nuclear war and I am shooting [youngsters] with marbles!

RB: With marbles! Did that keep them from throwing a bunch of rocks at you?

CV: After awhile, yes. We did it a couple of times and after awhile it was, "Amigo."

RB: [Laughter] That was great! I am a little confused. You enlisted and then you get this call to go to Columbus. Then you did four days, or so, of drill?

CV: That is all we did.

RB: Then they took you off. Did you ever go to boot camp?

CV: Yes, I went to boot camp.

RB: How long were you in Guantanamo Bay?

CV: Less than a month.

RB: Okay, because things had kind of quieted down after October. Right?

CV: Yes.

RB: Then you went back to Ohio?

CV: I went back to Ohio for two days, then I was supposed to report to the airport. At the airports, they used to have military [fellows] who would tell you what to do and where to go. I went to the airport and the [fellow] said, "Go over there and just wait. When they call your airplane number you are supposed to go." I did that. We went from Columbus to Treasure Island [San Francisco, California]. I was there for a month. From there I went to the Philippines.

RB: Wow! This is a boy from the small town who goes to the big city, San Francisco! Then across the world to the Philippines. What did you think of that?

CV: I am telling you, my whole world burst open!

RB: [Laughter]

CV: My dad said to me, “Your whole world exists around Pandora, Gilboa, Lima, Ottawa, [towns in Ohio], but when you get out to the world, boy, your whole world is going to burst wide open.” That is exactly what happened.

RB: Yes.

CV: All of a sudden, man, I am a man of the world!

RB: You were seeing things that [youngsters] back in Gilboa [Ohio] had no idea of.

CV: Heck, yes! He told me, “So far in your life, you have read about other people and have, maybe, heard other languages and movies, but now you are going to experience it.”

RB: Yes.

CV: My mother said, “You treat everybody like you want them to treat you.”

RB: She was a smart woman!

CV: Yes.

RB: What did you do in the Philippines? Where did you go?

CV: I went to Sangley Point which is in Manila Bay [the Philippines]. I was a photographer. In those days, every person, no matter what your job was in the Navy, you went to the mess decks [a place on ship where military personnel socialize and eat]. I went to themes decks. I was just coming off the farm, a farm [youngster]!

RB: Right! [Laughter]

CV: The chief said, “Boy, you are the youngest man here, so you have the worst job.” “What is that, chief?” “You get the scullery [the kitchen area used for washing dishes].” I didn’t know what scullery was. He took me and said, “This is your job.” He showed me about thirty trays that were two and a half feet wide and three feet long. Those four-inch deep trays? Remember those?

RB: Yes.

CV: There was about thirty of those in two stacks. He said, “You take these and they had deep sinks.” There were fourteen deep sinks. The first four had hot soapy water. The last ten [didn’t have] any soap, just hot water.

RB: You had to wash and rinse?

CV: Yes. In each [sink] there was a big heavy brush, with thick stiff bristles. He said, "You put this tray down here, scrub it out with this brush, give it the once over, dump water on it and go to the next tray. Hang on to that brush. Take the next brush down and do it the same. You do that four times." By the fourth time your tray is clean. Then you take it into the ten hot water trays and rinsed it off. "When you rinse off the last one, the last rinse, you take the tray and hang it up here." "Okay." "See that hose over there?" There is a real fat hose and it has a little bitty hole in the end. He said, "Don't get that water on you because it is boiling hot. You just spray off the tray." "Okay." "You start your work at 6:00 in the morning and when you finish, you can go." "Go where?" "Go wherever you want." "Do you drink?" "No, sir." "Do you smoke?" "No, sir." "What do you do for fun?" "I swim, go read, play pool." "Okay. Usually they finish about 1:00 or 1:30 p.m. then you are off for the rest of the day." "Okay, chief."

The first day I showed up for work. I turned on my rock and roll music on the radio. I finished about 12:30. I thought, heck, I can finish earlier than this. Just have to work faster and work harder. I started doing that and I cut my time down to 10:00 a.m.

RB: [Laughter]

CV: Then I got to 9:30 a.m.

RB: Oh, man! What time did you start?

CV: [I started] at 6:00 a.m.

RB: Three and a half hours?

CV: Yes. Then I would lock up the scullery. The last thing you did — the walls must have been made out of polished rock. They looked like marble. You had a large squeegee [that] was kind of like windshield wiper material. You ran it down the wall, squeegeed the wall and then you squeegeed the floor. That was the way it was supposed to be. You put your squeegee up and locked the doors so nobody could go in there and mess anything up. That was that. Then I went to the barracks, took a shower, laid in my bunk in my underwear and read.

RB: [Laughter]

CV: About noon, I would get up, go to the mess and get something to eat. Then I would go swimming. That was my day. One day I was laying in my bunk reading —.

RB: When you say, the barracks, was this on the ship or —?

CV: No, no this was on land.

RB: Okay. Go ahead, you said one day you were —.

CV: I was laying in my skivvies and was reading. One of the [fellows] said, “Hey, “Chris” the chief is looking for you and he is mad!” Ohh! “Why?” “I don’t know, but he is mad!” “Okay.” I jumped in my clothes and went down to the mess decks. I said, “Chief, what can I do for you?” “Where in the hell have you been, boy?” I said, “You told me that when I was done working I was done for the day.” He looked at me and said, “You mean to tell me, you are done?” I said, “Well, sir, I finished at 9:30 a.m.” “9:30?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “Well, let’s go see it.” He looked in the scullery and it was clean like it was supposed to be. The deep sinks were scrubbed out, no residue or anything, no soap left in them or nothing. He said, “Well, you did what you were supposed to.” I said, “Yes, sir.” “Don’t call me sir!”

RB: Yes?

CV: “What did you do before you came into the Navy?” I said, “I worked on a farm, chief.” “Well, no wonder.”

RB: [Laughter]

CV: Any job they gave me in the Navy I didn’t think it was hard. They gave me the worst jobs, they weren’t hard for me, I just zipped right through them.

RB: Growing up, did you work hard around the house? Learned how to work?

CV: Yes, on the farm. Heck, yes! When I was fourteen [years old] I was throwing bales seventeen high.

RB: Wow!

CV: Depending who you worked for, they were either seventy-five or eighty pound bales.

RB: So he was impressed with your hard work?

CV: He was impressed with my work. He [the chief] said, “Boy, tomorrow you come into work with a clean tee-shirt and fresh dungarees. You are too good to put in the scullery here.” “Okay.” “I am going to put some flunky in this job.”

RB: [Laughter]

CV: I didn’t know what the heck he was talking about. I don’t know it. The next morning I came in and he put me on the serving line. That was my job from then on.

RB: Working in the kitchen? Not in the kitchen, but in the mess hall.

CV: Yes. The scullery is part of the mess hall too, but I was in the back. I wasn't with everybody else.

RB: You were with a dishwasher and now you are serving.

CV: Yes! I was on the serving line one day, I had been working there three days. We served SOS — remember that?

RB: Steel wool with soap on it

CV: No, finely cut beef.

RB: No, I don't know that. This was a kind of food?

CV: They had some kind of gravy on it. One [fellow] would put a piece of bread on a [fellow's] tray, then I would stack a lot of beef on there, some gravy on it. The [fellow] said, "What is this shit?"

RB: [Laughter]

CV: He was an E-6 [enlisted grade six] I wasn't going to say anything to an E-6. The chief was standing behind me. I said, "It is chipped beef." He said, "Well, you got anything else?" The chief said, "Velasquez, go in the refer [refrigerator] and get me two slices of horse cock." Remember how the baloney, there was ham, what the heck did they call that?

RB: Spam?

CV: It was some kind of a ham, but it had all of these kind of like veggies in [it]. Sandwich meat. "Cut me some horse cock about one inch thick."

RB: It was called horse cock?

CV: Yes, because it came in these tubes. It was baloney and ham about this long [gesturing about one foot wide], and you cut off the end. Then you put it on a slicer and that is how you cut up sandwich meat. "If you find some bread in there" Then he turned to the sailor and said, "Do you like mayonnaise, ketchup or" that other [ingredient] that looks like mayonnaise. What the heck do they call that? I can't think of it right off hand. The sailor says, "I would like a little bit of mayonnaise, Chief. A little bit of mustard." [The Chief said], "Put some mayonnaise on one piece of bread and mustard on the other, Velasquez." He said to the sailor, "Do you want coffee?" "Yes, sir." "Black?" "Yes." I said, "Okay." The Chief said, "Get me a cup of coffee, black." I went to the refer. Man, you walked in there and it was freezing in there.

RB: Oh, yes.

CV: I cut the sandwich meat, a piece of ham and a piece of sandwich meat about an inch thick. It was frozen. I mean to tell you it was so hard you could probably throw it to the wall.

RB: [Laughter] Yes?

CV: I put some mustard on one side [of the bread] and put mayonnaise on the other side and I slapped them together. There was the sandwich. I had two of those. I picked up a tray, took the tray out, closed the door to the refer, went over and got a cup, filled it with black coffee and took it over to the table. The chief said to him, "This is going to be your meal for the rest of this week." This was a Monday morning. "You are going to have this morning, noon and dinner."

RB: Oh, man! Really?

CV: The chief said to him, "The next time you complain about chipped beef, you will get the same. You understand me, sailor?" "Yes, chief."

RB: [Laughter]

CV: "If you don't show up one time, I am going to come get you and take you to captain's mess. You understand me?" "Yes, chief." "Okay. You come to my table every day for three times a day." The [fellow] showed up at the chief's table every day. He always drank his coffee first and then waited until the meat was somewhat thawed out.

RB: [Laughter]

CV: He couldn't bite it.

RB: No!

CV: It was so hard. He always called [out to me], "Get me another cup of coffee, Velasquez." "Yes, sir." So I got him another cup of coffee. That poor sailor! I felt sorry for the [fellow], but it was his problem.

RB: He never did that again, I guess. [Laughter] How did you get into photography?

CV: I got into photography in high school. My art teacher is the one who got me started. I really enjoyed it. After I left the mess decks I went to the squadron and I was on the beach crew. The beach crew, man that was a job! The airplanes landed just in the water, they were not amphibious planes. Amphibious planes can either land on the water or on land. But these planes could not land on land, they landed

on the water, so we had to swim out to the aircraft with the tires. We called them mounts. One day, I swam out to the airplane with a mount bomb. I helped the crew and put it on the aircraft. [The other crew member] said, "Get up on the mount." So I got up on the mount and said, "What is the matter?" He just points. I turned around and there was a grenade coming toward me. At that very moment, something splashed in front of the shark and the shark bit at it. When the shark bites at whatever is in front of it, you know it is hungry. Pretty soon he came on and all of a sudden there was a muffled explosion. The [shark] fin slowed down and then [the shark] rolled belly up. You could see the hole the concussion made in his belly.

RB: Oh, man!

CV: The shark wasn't that big [gesturing]. It was only [about] a six foot shark. The mouth was only about, I would say, this big around [gesturing about one foot in an oblong shape.].

RB: Did you say it was a mouth?

CV: A what?

RB: I didn't understand the word you said. What was six inches around? The mouth?

CV: Not six inches, about this big around [gesturing twelve to eighteen inches with his hands].

RB: What was that?

CV: The shark's mouth.

RB: Oh, the shark's mouth. Got it!

CV: Like I said, it was about a six foot shark. Its mouth was about that big, but that would have taken a big chunk out of a skinny behind [the other sailor]!

RB: Oh, yes!

CV: The [fellow] says to me, "Get in the aircraft." So I got in the plane and sat on the bunk. They had like four bunks there. I sat on one. I sat there shaking, man, this is what could have happened. The shark could have bitten my leg, if he hadn't told me to get up on the mount. We could feel the aircraft being pulled ashore up the ramp. When it got up on the ramp, they put the ladder on and I went down the ladder to the beach shack. I took a shower, took my swimming trunks off and hung them on the clothesline along with our tennis shoes. Each one of us had two pairs of tennis shoes. One that you swum with and the other [pair] that you put on after you got out of the water. I [was] sitting there after I dried off, I went into the

shack and put on some shorts and a tee-shirt and the boss comes up. “Were you scared?” I said, “Boss, I was so scared, I was shaking like dog passing glass!”

RB: [Laughter]

CV: And all the [fellows] laughed. One of the [fellows] said to me, “We expect you to tell us a lie!” I had just come off the farm and I didn’t know anything about lying. “Why would I lie to you?” “We don’t know. We just figured you might lie to us.” “I am not going to lie to you. I was scared. You think I wasn’t scared of that shark coming at me?” I worked there for a couple of months. I worked in the mess decks for a month and a half. A [fellow] said, “You will never get out of here. It takes four months to get out of here.” I got out in a month and a half. I worked for two and a half months on the beach crew and then they sent me to the photo lab. {That’s where} I started doing my work.

RB: Is that where you stayed for the rest of your career?

CV: That is where I stayed?

RB: How long were you in the Philippines?

CV: I got there the first part of November 1962 and I left the Philippines in 1964. I was in there for quite a spell.

RB: Then where did you go?

CV: I went to Atsugi, Japan. Which was an intelligence gathering station. That is an oxymoron because there isn’t any intelligence.

RB: [Laughter] Right!

CV: I was there for a month and a half and I got a call from personnel. “Hey, Velasquez, I am cutting you a set of orders?” “What? I just got here. “Well, I am cutting you a set of orders?” “Where are they from?” “Washington, D. C.” I said to myself: I smell Bob Carlisle. Bob Carlisle was an AD PAO [Public Affairs Officer].

RB: Public affairs?

CV: Yes. He said, “Yes, a [fellow] named Carlisle.” I said, “Yes, I know him.” “You are to be there on December 13 or 14.” So I went to Washington, D. C. and he handed me a placard that said, “Fly Navy.” That is all it said on it. He said, “I want you to go to London [England] and photograph everything you can.” “Okay.” I went to London and photographed that “Fly Navy” placard on taxis, double-decker buses, even on a bicycle in Piccadilly Circle.

RB: [Laughter] Wow! This was to advertise to get youth to join the Navy?

CV: I guess. I borrowed the embassy Rolls Royce and went to Buckingham Palace. The driver was dressed in this black suit chauffeur uniform. He had the door open and was looking toward the Swiss guard. Kind like he was expecting the queen to come out. On the front license plate there was a placard, "Fly Navy."

RB: [Laughter] Great!

CV: That was the one they chose. The one I really liked was the one on the bicycle in Piccadilly Circle. There were all these cars around and this [fellow] was riding a bicycle.

RB: "Fly Navy." That was kind of a neat assignment.

CV: Yes, that was kind of fun.

RB: Was that a short term assignment? Or did you stay in England?

CV: I stayed in England for two months. He said, "I am going to give you three weeks there." I said, "No, no. You can't do that." He said, "Why not?" It is going to take me longer than that." "How much time do you need?" I said, "At least three months." "I can't do that." "Why not? You are the boss." "Well, I know, but [this shoot] isn't going to take three months. Okay. I will give you two months." Done. So I went to England for two months. While I was there I bunked with one of the Marines whose partner just left for the states. He said, "Hey, "Chris"!" "I said, "Yes." "I need to ask a favor of you." I said, "Well, I owe you." I was staying at this apartment for free. He said, "My girlfriend's cousin is coming up from the farm. How about you taking her out?" I said, "Oh, she is five foot, 260 pounds and great disposition. Right?"

RB: [Laughter]

CV: "No, man! She is really cute. If I wasn't dating my girlfriend, I would date her." "Okay." So I took her out. We went to dinner and then dancing. We had a lot of fun. Afterwards, we took them to their apartment. She said, "Chris, I had a marvelous time. Be a love and knock me up sometime." My friend and his date kind of chuckled a little bit. His date went over to her cousin and whispered something in her ear and the girl went "Oh" [gesturing by putting his hand over his mouth in shock].

RB: [Laughter]

CV: "I didn't realize what I had said."

RB: Oh, dear!

CV: I said, "I had a marvelous time and I will call you sometime." "Okay." She was going to be there for a couple of weeks. I called her a couple of times and we went out. We had fun. Then I [came] back to the states. Carlisle was really happy with the work I had done. He put me on a national crew. On the national crew, we went all around the United States taking pictures, movies [and] stills. The one job that got me on the international crew was when he sent us to Hollywood, Florida. He said, "There is not much happening in Hollywood, Florida, but you might find something to take some good pictures." "Okay." I discovered that they had a racetrack in Hollywood, Florida, horseraces.

RB: Right.

CV: In the middle of the infield, they had a small pond with —

[END OF RECORDING ONE.]

CV: — flamingos. I got an idea. This is going to be a good job! I want you to take about ten feet of these flamingos. There were three of us with movie cameras and three others had still 35 mm [cameras]. I told [one of them], "I want you to photograph the crowd in the grandstand." "Okay." "What are you going to do?" "I am going to photograph the horses coming out of the gate." I photographed the horses coming out of the gate, the crowd, the infield, the grandstand and the [fellow] with the flamingos. After we finished the job, we edited the film and I put the horses first, then I switched real quick to the grandstand, the people standing up, then I switched over to the — I went back to the horses and you could see them coming towards you. Contrary to popular belief, they always talk about the horse went to the rails, they don't have rails. They have bars that go like this [gesturing about three inches with his fingers]. I was underneath one of these bars taking pictures of the horses coming towards me. Which was exactly what I wanted. I turned off my camera and slide out from underneath so I didn't spook the horses. They came roaring by, thundering by. When I edited the film I put the horses coming down toward the rail, then I went to the grandstand, then I went to the flamingos, back to the horses [and] back to the grandstand. Boy, they loved it!

RB: That sounds really good!

CV: Yes, it was. It was good! We took some movies of some dog races, too. They had dog races at night. I had never bet on horses. I had never bet on dogs. So I thought: "Well, I will put \$2.00 on this particular dog." I put \$2.00 on the dog and that little turkey, man they were going down in front of the grandstand and he stopped and went around the other direction.

RB: [Laughter]

CV: That cured me of that!

RB: I wonder if we can meet again next week. I have to go to another appointment right now. We have been talking for—it's about 4:35 right now. Could we meet again next Tuesday?

CV: Sure. Same time?

RB: Same time, 3:00 p.m. Okay.

CV: Okay.

[END OF RECORDING TWO.]

[Next session on February 12, 2019] Added by Randy at review.

RB: I am trying to remember what we were talking about at our last session. We got as far as — when you were in London with your “Fly Navy” project.

CV: Oh yes,

RB: Then you came back from there and where were you?

CV: I was in Japan.

RB: Atsugi [Naval Air Station].

CV: No, not Atsugi.

RB: At Yokosuka [Navy base]?

CV: No.

RB: Sasebo [Navy Base]?

CV: No. Those are all locations. This place was an intelligence gathering site.

RB: Alright, so that is after you finished your job?

CV: After I finished my job in London. I came back and went back to my destination, where I was stationed before I went to London.

RB: Let's start there.

[END OF RECORDING THREE.]

RB: Alright. Today is February 12, 2019. I am with Cresencio Velasquez. We are picking up from where we left off a week ago. I am Randy Bunn. I was asking "Chris" after he left his assignment in London, where he went? Tell me where you went.

CV: I am trying to think of the name of the place in Japan.

RB: It was in Japan. Intelligence gathering place?

CV: A Navy intelligence gathering place which is an oxymoron there ain't no intelligence gathering!

RB: [Laughter] Was it near Tokyo? In the mainland Japan or someplace else?

CV: No. Darn it!

RB: It really wasn't a Naval, Air Force or Army base?

CV: It was a Navy base.

RB: A Navy base?

CV: Yes.

RB: Okay.

CV: I can't think of the place.

RB: Okay. No problem, but you were in Japan?

CV: Yes.

RB: You were in Washington, D. C. before you went to London? At the public affairs [office]?

CV: No, at the Naval Photographic Center.

RB: Naval Photographic Center. Where is that?

CV: It is in Washington, D. C.

RB: It is, okay.

CV: Are you familiar with Bolling Field [Air Force Base]?

RB: Yes.

CV: We were at the west end of Bolling Field. The Naval Photographic Center is a big huge building. I think there is something like 600 people who work there. All photographers and about 400 of them are sailors and the rest are civilians. I had a good time there. Me and two other [fellows] were selected to go. Each U.S. president has his own photographer.

RB: Is that right?

CV: Yes. When [Richard M.] Nixon took office he didn't have a personal photographer. So somebody called into the [National] Photographic [Center] and requested some photographers. So me and two other [fellows] went, two sailors and one Marine. The three of us went there. We found a place called the photo lab, but it was a mess.

RB: [Laughter]

CV: We spent two weeks cleaning that place up. After we cleaned it up, we went to work. We didn't photograph [President] Nixon, we did congressional luncheons, anything that had congressional on it we took care of it.

RB: So you went on a lot of different photo shoots? Is that how that worked?

CV: Yes.

RB: Did you meet any memorable or interesting people in that job?

CV: No.

RB: No?

CV: No, we didn't have a chance. We just did our work.

RB: [Laughter]

CV: That is all they wanted us for — just do your work.

RB: What kind of a camera did you use?

CV: We used a Speed Graphic [a press camera produced by Graflex, Rochester, New York].

RB: You would go out, take the photos, bring them back and develop them?

CV: We couldn't process them at the photo lab, because we didn't have the processing [capability] so we sent them over to the photographic center and they processed

them for us. Then they sent them back. We looked at the proofs, told them how we wanted them printed and they printed them for us, no problem. It was a fun job.

RB: Yes. I forget — were you married at the time or were you single?

CV: I was single at the time.

RB: Alright. In D. C. there are a lot of things to do.

CV: Oh, yes! A lot of things to do. And there are women — Holy Cow!

RB: [Laughter]

CV: Oh, my goodness! There is like ten women to one [fellow].

RB: Wow!

CV: Because the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] hires all women.

RB: That is true.

CV: A lot of those offices, that is all they hire, is women.

RB: Right.

CV: So there were women from all over there. You didn't have any problem getting a date.

RB: [Laughter]

CV: The thing that was strange to me, not strange just different for me — I took a girl out one time she said, "All I have is \$75.00." I said, "'75.00? You mean that is all you have until payday?" "Yes." I said, "Okay, do you want me to loan you some money?" "No, I will be alright." I couldn't understand why she was telling me she only had \$75.00. I finally said to her, "Look, why are you telling me you only have \$75.00 and you don't want me to loan you some money?" She said, "Well, if we go to a place to eat, that is all I can pay for." "No, no, no, you don't pay for food. I pay for food." She said, "Well, out here when we date, the girl pays."

RB: What?

CV: Yes! Isn't that something?

RB: I never heard of that.

CV: I never have either.

RB: [Laughter]

CV: I said, "Not with this [fellow], honey! I pay for the food. I pay wherever we go."
"Are you sure?" "Of course."

RB: That is really funny.

CV: We had a good time. I paid for it and everything was okay. She kept her \$75.00
bucks! [Laughter]

RB: To last her until payday.

CV: Yes.

RB: Then they sent you off to Japan.

CV: Yes. Darn it, I still can't think of the name of that place. I went to Japan. When I
was in Japan I got a call, "Hey "Chris" I am sending you a set of orders." "What?
I just got here. My household effects aren't even here yet. So what is up?" Well, it
looks like Bob Carlisle, a Navy PAO [Public Affairs Officer], that is the one who
[designed] the little license placard, "Fly Navy". I went to London and did that
job, came back and went to Japan. You know, I think it was Atsugi.

RB: Okay.

CV: I served out my year and a half there. Then I went on a ship and went overseas.
While I was on the ship, they used to call me to cut me a set of orders all the time.
"Where are you going?" "Where am I going?" "You are going to this place or this
place." "Okay."

RB: Let me get this straight. You were in Japan Atsugi [Naval Air Station]. That was
an intelligence gathering office that you worked with?

CV: Yes.

RB: What did you do there?

CV: Just did my photography work. That is all I did. They didn't let you do anything
else. Personally, you didn't want to do anything else because it took you away
from your job.

RB: Were the photo assignments of official portraits, that kind of [photography]?

CV: [Fellows] re-enlisting, something happened at the base and you went and took pictures of it.

RB: That is right, if there was a crash, or something like that —.

CV: Or somebody did something in the building and [we] took pictures of it.

RB: Alright, so then you [received] orders and you went on a ship.

CV: I went on a ship.

RB: Do you know the ship you were on?

CV: Sure. I was on the [USS] *Kittyhawk*, a carrier.

RB: No kidding?

CV: If you look on the wall [gesturing] there is a picture of the *Kittyhawk* right there. I shot that in 1965.

RB: That is in your room.

CV: No, it is right here in my room.

RB: In the den?

CV: [Inaudible]

RB: Okay, I will look at it when we finish. Cool! You were on the *Kittyhawk* and [it] was stationed out of where?

CV: San Diego [California], no, not San Diego, Los Angeles [California].

RB: You flew back to Los Angeles —

CV: No.

RB: — or you hooked up with it in Japan or?

CV: I hooked up with it in LA [Los Angeles] and we went on a deployment. We just did our work.

RB: Do you remember about when this was? When you [were] assigned to the *Kittyhawk*?

CV: I think it was early 1965.

RB: So this was before Vietnam was really getting hot and heavy.

CV: Oh, yes.

RB: Where all did you go? Do you remember?

CV: On the deployment?

RB: Yes.

CV: We were all over — the Philippines, Japan, Singapore [and] Hong Kong.

RB: Join the Navy and you were seeing the world! [Laughter]

CV: Yes! [Laughter] I didn't see it through a port hole either —

RB: No.

CV: — like the joke says.

RB: You saw it through your lens!

CV: Yes. [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter] That was pretty good.

CV: Yes, that was a lot of fun for me.

RB: What was it like living on a ship?

CV: Oh, man! Really, it was awful!

RB: Really?

CV: Yes, because they have fuel for airplanes and helicopters. Helicopters take JP-4 [fuel]. Jet planes take JP-5. The ships fuel, which is, I don't know what they called it, but it is not as well processed as JP-4 or JP-5. After awhile everything smells like fuel on a carrier. You go to the mess deck and it smells like fuel.

RB: [Does] the food taste like fuel, too?

CV: Yes. It doesn't taste like it, but you can imagine it everywhere.

RB: [Laughter] Oh, man! The *Kittyhawk* is a huge ship, right?

CV: Yes, pretty big ship.

RB: How many, 4,000 —?

CV: No, 6,000.

RB: Six-thousand? [That is] a little city.

CV: There might have been 5,800 sailors.

RB: What were your quarters like? Did you sleep in an area with a bunch of seamen?

CV: Oh, yes, with other sailors and each division was assigned its own berthing compartment. Ours was right above the photo lab and print shop. We would just jump up in the morning and take a shower, dry off, get dressed, go down to the lab and go to work or you go to breakfast and then go to work. There always was a lot of work to do. You would be surprised. You would think: what in the heck are you going to do out in the middle of the ocean? But there always were re-enlistments, accidents with an airplane and we would go take pictures of it. It is just incredible.

RB: At that time, in 1965 or so, were there women on ships?

CV: No.

RB: It was all men?

CV: All men.

RB: All men. So 5,800 [fellows] out in the middle of the ocean.

CV: That was it.

RB: [Laughter]

CV: I am telling you! When we pulled into a port, holy cow, [fellows] were streaming off the ship.

RB: [Laughter] Oh, man! Like mice that are trying to get off [the ship]. [Laughter]

CV: Yes. [Laughter]

RB: You said you went to Singapore, Hong Kong, Subic Bay, —

CV: Tokyo.

RB: When you [arrived] to some ports of call, what all did you do? What did you like to do?

CV: I didn't drink, didn't smoke and I didn't like to chase the skirts either. I wanted to go home with what I left with. I didn't want to go home with [things] I didn't leave with, so I went sightseeing.

RB: [Laughter] Did you like that?

CV: Yes. We had a lot of fun.

RB: That is great. Did you bring back souvenirs [from] here and there? No?

CV: Yes, I did.

RB: Some good memories then?

CV: I brought my best friend's mother, I bought it in Japan, a little teapot [with] six little cups. She just loved it. Her step-daughter — "Mom, I want that when you are gone!"

RB: That was nice. [Laughter]

CV: I didn't think it would cause such a big hubbub — but it did. It wasn't such a big deal. I think I only paid [about] \$8.00 for it. But they thought it was great.

RB: Japan, at that time, was about twenty years after the war — were things still kind of, not like they are now, real high-tech, probably still recovering from the war?

CV: No, they had pretty much recovered.

RB: Interesting.

CV: We pulled into Sasebo [Navel Base]. Sasebo, during the war, was a main shipping area for Japanese armament. That is why they bombed it. That is why they bombed Hiroshima [Japan]. Hiroshima was just over the mountains. There was a mountain range, one to the east and one to the west, and Hiroshima lies in the trough of those bombs. We pulled into Sasebo and then we would just go over the mountains and just take the armament over to the ship, and the ship would leave Sasebo. They would go to Vietnam and use that as a staging area, in Cam Rahn Bay. Cam Rahn Bay has about 250 or 300 acres of nothing but sand. So the Japanese used that area for the staging area. They wanted armaments and that is where they were delivered.

RB: Did you, by any chance, go to the sites where the [atomic] bombs were dropped at Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

CV: Yes, of course.

RB: What was that like?

CV: They had pretty much recovered although you could still see some damage from the bombs. [When] they dropped the bomb, they had a fuse that would set it off [at] a certain height. When it reached 1,800 feet the bomb would go off, a proximity fuse. I couldn't figure out why they set it off at 1,800 feet. But when I saw Hiroshima I realized why. Because the center of the trough of those two mountain ranges and the explosion when it went off, it reverberated between the two mountain ranges.

RB: I see.

CV: Whatever building wasn't knocked down, it was sure knocked down afterwards by the reverberation. At one place, you could still see a shadow on the cement walk.

RB: No kidding?

CV: Where somebody just got vaporized.

RB: Oh, my gosh! That must have been kind of sobering to —.

CV: It was.

RB: I think so many people died in just a split second. Wow! How long did you serve on the *Kittyhawk*?

CV: Two years.

RB: Did you get to Vietnam also? Or not?

CV: Oh, yes. But that was later.

RB: Did you get another assignment after the *Kittyhawk*?

CV: I went what they called TAD, temporary assignment duty. They wanted me to go to Cam Rahn Bay in Vietnam. We had a processing machine that I helped to troubleshoot for Kodak. I knew all about that machine. They said, "Velasquez knows everything about that machine. He kept it running." So they took me off the ship and sent me to Cam Rahn Bay. That was all we did. The military gets these trailers, these eighteen wheelers, and they take the wheels off. They put them up on telephone poles so they are up off the ground about five feet. We had six of those. Each one had a processing machine in [it]. My job was to make sure

that everything ran well because they were mapping Vietnam in 1964. I didn't know they were mapping it. I know they were mapping it once I looked at the negatives. The film that they shot it with was ten by ten and 200 feet long.

RB: Oh, my goodness!

CV: That was why they wanted the processing machines.

RB: The aircraft would take photos.

CV: Aircraft would take photos. Then they would send the photos to us to process. They were Navy, Marines and Air Force.

RB: They would be printed on paper that was just really long?

CV: No. Each one was printed, usually, like eleven by fourteen.

RB: Okay, I see. You had a whole book of them.

CV: Yes. We didn't do the printing. We sent it out to different photo labs in Japan. [On] each photograph and negative, you could see a little clock in the upper right hand corner. That clock told you the date, the time when it was shot. You went by that clock. You got another photograph right after that and it showed the time on there. That is how you printed everything in sequence.

RB: Were some of them, perhaps, shots before a bombing raid and after a bombing raid?

CV: Oh, no. This was way before. [We were] just mapping the place.

RB: Alright.

CV: This was in 1964.

RB: Okay. So it wasn't quite built up yet. .

RB: What was that assignment like for you in Cam Rahn Bay?

CV: It was alright. It was a job for me.

RB: Where did you live?

CV: Right there in Cam Rahn Bay.

RB: Not on the ship?

CV: No.

RB: There were some barracks?

CV: No, we didn't have any barracks. They dug a pit [with] railroad ties that were twenty feet long. They put them close together, sand bags on top and sand on the sand bags. They had sand in the bags, but they would throw sand on top of that, some more sand bags, more sand, more sand bags and more sand on top.

RB: Was this to build up a foundation?

CV: Yes, and besides, if "Charlie" [Viet Cong] would shoot and if a shell would land on the sand, it just blew up sand.

RB: I see, it didn't wreck the whole thing.

CV: Yes. And the rats! Oh, my goodness!

RB: Oh, gosh!

CV: They were terrible. The rats would crawl up on top of the beam and drop down on you. We had [what] we called space blankets. You took a space blanket and you covered up the top portion of your body with a space blanket. Another space blanket [you] covered the lower portion of your body.

RB: [Laughter]

CV: You didn't take off your clothes to sleep, you slept in your clothes because the rats would smell to see if you had bare feet. They would bite your toes.

RB: [Laughter] Oh, man! That is awful!

CV: It was terrible! I got so I wouldn't even sleep in the bunker. I would go on top. [I thought], "If a shell hits me, I'm dead." But that's alright.

RB: That was better than being chewed on by a rat.

CV: Heck, yes!

RB: That is crazy!

CV: One [fellow], we told him that [he] had to cover head up with the space blanket. "Why?" We told him [about] the rats. "On, no, I am not afraid of rats." "It is not that you are not afraid of them, but it is that they just drop down on you when they find an area that is exposed. They come down and take a big chunk out of you." "Oh, I am not afraid of them." "Okay."

RB: They could have a disease too.

CV: Rats are natural carriers of bubonic plague.

RB: You don't want to get chewed on by rats.

CV: I am telling you, this [sailor], one morning when he woke up the whole bunker — he was screaming. "What the heck is the matter with you?" "I got bit, man!" A rat took a big chunk out of his cheek.

RB: Oh, gosh! [Laughter]

CV: It was terrible, I am telling you! That is why I didn't sleep in the bunker. I slept on top.

RB: How long were you in this TAD [Temporary Assigned Duty] assignment?

CV: I was there for ten months.

RB: Ten months? Wow, that was long.

CV: Yes. They used to say, "Don't lock and load." In other words, don't load your weapon until you know you are being fired upon. The heck with that noise! I stepped out of the mess decks or wherever and I loaded my weapon ...locked and loaded. I was not going to wait to get shot.

RB: [Laughter]

CV: Lock and load my weapon.

RB: After this assignment you went back to —?

CV: No. After that assignment, they said they needed [fellows] down in the Delta [Mekong Delta, Vietnam].

RB: Oh? You stayed in Vietnam.

CV: Yes, down in the Mekong Delta. I said, "Okay." And went down to the Mekong Delta. I would have gone back to Cam Rahn Bay.

RB: What was the Delta like?

CV: It was terrible. You would go down a river and Charlie [Viet Cong enemy] would shoot at you. I was sitting there talking to the coxswain of this one boat that I was on called a monitor [a river monitor is a military craft designed to patrol rivers].

The monitor had a flamethrower. They welded up the flat that came down. It was a World War II landing craft. They welded up a flat and on the middle of the flat they put a flame thrower. On each corner of the flat they put a thirty-caliber machine gun. We were going down the river and I am talking to the coxswain. The coxswain had a steel plate that surrounded his steering wheel and the back of it was open, but the sides were closed in. I was standing there along the side and a bullet came by and hit that half-inch covering and bounced off [ricocheted] and I thought: holy cow! As soon as that happened, he turned in toward the shore and beached the landing craft. Four recon [reconnaissance] Marines jumped out. All they were wearing were shorts and a hat. They went out and found the sniper that shot at us. One of the [fellows] threw a grenade in the spider hole that the sniper was in and it blew him up out of there. When he was in the air, the other Marine shot at him. I said, "Why did you [fellows] shoot at that sniper? He was already dead." "Practice, man, practice!"

RB: [Laughter]

CV: Yes, they were crazy!

RB: Explain for me a couple of things for the benefit of someone reading this later. You called the enemy, "Charlie".

CV: Yes, VC — [American soldiers referred to the Viet Cong as "Victor Charlie" or V-C. "Victor and "Charlie" are both letters in the NATO phonetic alphabet.]

RB: Viet Cong

CV: — Victor Charles.

RB: Oh!

CV: Victor Charles, VC.

RB: So it was a short name of "Charlie." So whenever you said, "Watch out for Charlie," you were talking about the Viet Cong lurking around, not the North Vietnamese Army, necessarily.

CV: Those were NVA's. [North Vietnamese Army].

RB: Have you ever heard of Sappers? [Vietnamese demolition commandos]

CV: Sappers?

RB: Yes.

CV: Of course.

RB: My understanding [is that] Sappers were specially trained elite forces.

CV: No.

RB: No?

CV: They were [fellows] who were —. I will tell you a story about [them].

RB: Okay.

CV: After I was out of the bush for about nine days, I came in to the base camp. The first thing you always want to do is take a shower. When you are out in the bush you don't have a chance to take a shower. Charlie couldn't see you, so he would smell you coming in.

RB: [Laughter] So clean off so nobody is going to know that you are there by your smell.

CV: The first thing I wanted to do is take a shower. I ran into the shower, took off my clothes, and went to the shower. After I took a shower, of course, I felt a lot better, got dressed in some fresh clothes and went down to the barber shop to get a haircut and a shave. The barber did a good job. I took a little nap. I put the seat down and he put the hot towel on my face. Oh, man! That felt so good!

RB: Was this a local [barber]?

CV: No, this was a —.

RB: A GI?

CV: No, he was a local barber who worked on the base.

RB: Okay.

CV: He cut my hair and then he shaved me. After he shaved me, he woke me up. I got up, paid him and thanked him. Me and my buddy went to the restaurant to get something to eat. We got something to eat and went back to our hooch [improvised living space]. That night it was so hot in the hooch, our sleeping quarters that I slept on top of an addition. We built a little addition and I took an extra mattress and put it up there. I slept on that at night. It was a cool wind that blew at night and that kept the mosquitos off of you. I was up there sleeping and all of a sudden I heard this huge explosion. The left side of my body felt all the heat from the flame of the explosion. I went up on my left elbow and there was a Sapper between me and that helicopter that had exploded. What they used to do — they would take a grenade, put scotch tape on it, on het spoon, and, [when] they

pulled the pin, they would unscrew the gas cap on the helicopter and drop the grenade in there.

RB: Oh, man!

CV: When that went off, there was a huge fire ball, all that gasoline, all that fuel. What happened was that fuel would heat up the scotch tape and the spoon would fly off. In that seven seconds, before the spoon flew off, after the spoon flew off you had three seconds then the grenade exploded. That huge fire ball went up. I could feel the heat from it and I went up on my left elbow and there was a Sapper between me and the burning chopper.

RB: Oh man! You saw him?

CV: Yes. I slept with my shoulder holster on. That was the only weapon that I could carry, beside the camera. I don't know how the weapon got in my hand, but I had that in my hand. I put a bead on the [fellow] and I shot him three times. About that time, soldiers came pouring out of their hooches with their F-16s and they shot the [fellow] too. Afterwards, I went over and looked at the [fellow] and that was my barber!

RB: Oh, no? Really?

CV: Yes, that was my barber. I thought: this man could have cut my throat when I was sleeping. But he didn't.

RB: Oh, my gosh! Here he is shaving you, cutting your hair, you have a warm towel on your face —

CV: They do that to soften up your face.

RB: Yes, before they cut you. He was the enemy!

CV: Yes, he was.

RB: Oh, man! This was in the Mekong Delta area?

CV: Yes.

RB: Do you know what time frame this would have been? About what year?

CV: It had to be in 1965, but I can't remember exactly the month.

RB: But that gives me an idea, 1965 you were there. What was your grade at this time?

CV: I was an E-4 [enlisted grade four], no, an E-5.

RB: What was the rank?

CV: Second class. Same as a sergeant.

RB: In the Army?

CV: Yes.

RB: How long were you in the Mekong [Delta area]?

CV: We slept in this barracks ship and the officer [who] ran the barracks ship called me down to his office one day. I went down and he said, "Velasquez, you have been in Vietnam for almost two years." I said, "Yes, sir." "Well, pack your bags. I am sending you home tomorrow." "Okay." I didn't argue with him. [Laughter] I am going home! The next day a chopper came by, picked me up, took me to Da Nang [Vietnam] and I was gone. Just like that, I was gone!

RB: The chopper took you to Da Nang and from [there] you went to —.

CV: I went back to the [USS] *Kittyhawk*. When airplanes are coming in to land on a carrier, you always have a video camera [to] photograph each airplane landing.

RB: Is that right? Why is that?

CV: They critique the landing.

RB: Like a football training film where you can go back and see how they did.

CV: Yes. Go back and see how you did. If you didn't do it right. Boy, some of those pilots [were] chewed out, alright. They missed the — they want you to get the second wire. If you didn't get the second wire, you got the third wire, boy, they chewed him out. Said they needed more practice. So they practiced more landings. One day [while] I was there, I had just finished my stint movies of airplane landings, and I was going back to the lab. All of a sudden, the alarm bell went off — accident. I went to my station, grabbed my camera and went to see what the heck the problem was. What [had] happened was: the airplane came in and the wire broke, the wire that catches the airplane broke. It flipped around and two sailors were walking on the flight deck. They weren't in the way of the airplane that was landing, but the wire was whipping around. It cut one sailor's leg off and it took a big chunk out of the side of the other one's body, just above [his] belt. They both died. I took pictures of that. Man, it was awful! Blood all over the place. The officer in charge of those cables, they call them wires, he chewed out a lot of [fellows] because they should have replaced that wire. After so many trays [of planes landing] they replace all of them because they can break.

RB: Did you have any other kind of horrific experiences on the *Kittyhawk* like that? Or was that the main one?

CV: No, that was the main one. They are pretty careful about having accidents like that. You only do what you are supposed to do on a flight deck. They have different colored jerseys that do different things. Like “armors” wear red jerseys, or red vests, I should say. Fuelers, they wear blue vests. [Fellows who] all they do is move the airplane, they wear a different colored vest. You can only go this far and this way. You can’t do this — you have to do your job. This is what you do, this is how you do it. They all follow that because, like I say, accidents won’t happen if you are careful. So they were real careful, alright. You have heard the phrase, “Nine yards,” haven’t you?

RB: No, what does that mean?

CV: They say, “The whole nine yards.”

RB: Okay, I know what you mean.

CV: That phrase came from when an airplane came in to refuel and rearm. They would refuel it on the main deck because they didn’t want to refuel it down in the hanger bay. They had bombs down there. If you get fuel on the floor down there, something might set it off and they would have explosions [from] the bombs. So they refueled it up on the main deck. [The] Armor [fellows] would call up, “Sir, how much armor do you need?” “The whole nine yards.” Each fill of ammunition for an aircraft is nine yards long.

RB: Oh, that is where it comes from?

CV: Yes. They would say, “The whole nine yards.” “Okay.” When they got the airplane down in the hangar bay they start putting the ammunition, lay it down real neat. They don’t just throw it in there, because that would jam up the gun. So they have to lay it down real straight. When it comes to the end of one [row of armor] they put another shell in there and hook it up to the next one that they lay down on top. So on and so forth until they [are] completely loaded.

RB: That is interesting.

CV: A lot of words they we use today are Navy words.

RB: Yes.

CV: “Show them the ropes.” “Show them the ropes” came from the sailing ships that the sails were all hooked to ropes. Sometimes you had to pull on those to raise a sail. They didn’t have automatic things [hoists] like they do today. [Laughter] The

automatic [tool] was the sailor's strength — they had to pull those sails up. They had some [fellow] on the yard up there that would fold the sail as it was being pulled up. That term, "Show them the ropes" meant to show them to which sail [the rope was attached to].

RB: Oh, I see.

CV: Each mast has three sails, a big sail, a smaller sail and a real small sail at the top. The small sail, if you just want to cruise out of the harbor real slow, then you put up the small sail at the top.

RB: There are different ropes for each sail?

CV: Absolutely.

RB: You had to show another person the right rope for them to know the sail to work?

CV: Yes.

RB: That is interesting. I never knew that.

CV: The "head" is a term that they use for the bathroom. The "head" came from back in the sailing days, the sailors would take care of business at the head of the ship. They had ropes so if you took off your trousers, if you wanted to do the heavy stuff, you went up to the front. You put your feet on a bottom rope, slid out on it and grabbed the top rope. Then when you got to the place you wanted to go, you sat down on the second rope that was about at your waist and you took care of business. That is where the term "head" came from.

RB: They actually were hanging out over the water?

CV: Oh, yes!

RB: I never knew that either! [Laughter] [You] learned all kinds of things!

CV: Yes! I guess it was a lesson that everything had a meaning to it.

RB: Your Vietnam tour was about 1964 to 1966?

CV: No, 1964 to mid-1965.

RB: Was that the only time you had to serve in Vietnam?

CV: No. I went there three more times. Actually, five more times.

RB: Is that right?

CV: Yes. I did two terms in the air with reconnaissance outfits and four on the ground.

RB: You were on the *Kittyhawk* and then was it like a TDA assignment for you?

CV: No.

RB: They were actual —.

CV: I went from the *Kittyhawk* to back to the Naval Photographic Center in Washington, D. C. I was only there for about ten months. Usually you are there for a year and a half, but I was only there for ten months and they put me on a different ship.

RB: Which one was this?

CV: This was the [USS] *Enterprise*.

RB: Also an aircraft carrier?

CV: Yes.

RB: Where was that stationed? Norfolk [Virginia]?

CV: No, we were stationed out of — I can't think of the name of the place, but it was in Oakland [California].

RB: Okay.

CV: I am telling you when we pulled into port, oh, man; sailors would leave the ship like rats. They went to see their wives and girlfriends and some just wanted to go out and get drunk.

RB: [Laughter]

CV: The term, “drinks like a sailor,” I always resented that. Whoever coined that phrase never spent any time at sea. When you go on a carrier, sometimes you are at sea for seven or eight months without going into port. So no wonder they drink like a sailor!

RB: Did they allow alcohol on the ships?

CV: On no!

RB: No alcohol and, I guess, you are not supposed to have drugs either. Did [fellows] have drugs?

CV: Oh, yes.

RB: They kept that pretty low key?

CV: Yes.

RB: So after seven months, or however long, when they come into port that is the first time they can legally get a drink?

CV: Yes.

RB: So they are anxious. Where did the *Enterprise* take you?

CV: Same places, Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong —.

RB: Did you ever go to Australia?

CV: Oh, yes!

RB: Guam?

CV: No.

RB: Okinawa?

CV: Okinawa, yes. We pulled into Subic Bay and they would always put me on shore patrol for the first night. That was the worst night to be on shore patrol, because at about 10:00 p.m. [fellows] would have already picked out the girl they were going to spend the night with, fights broke out over a woman. Gosh!

RB: When you say shore patrol, what does that mean? What did you have to do?

CV: Kind of like police action.

RB: If they were getting out of line, you would —.

CV: They would call shore patrol. You went out and straighten the trouble up and take out the troublemakers and everything would come back to normal.

RB: Wow! [Laughter]

CV: We pulled into Subic and they put me on shore patrol. They put us down in an area called the Jungle. One side was a cul-de-sac of Black bars and on the other side it was Hispanic bars.

RB: [Laughter]

CV: The two got along together, never any trouble, except when a few Anglos would get down there. That was when the trouble [would begin].

RB: [Laughter] Did [fellows] know that you were not a drinker?

CV: They never tried to tempt me, “Come on, take a drink.” They would never do that. They knew I didn’t drink and so I would drink a soda while they were drinking beer.

RB: You would be the sober one that could kind of help break things up.

CV: Yes, but there never was [any] trouble when I was with them. Not because of me, but they didn’t want [any] trouble. They didn’t want shore patrol in there, because shore patrol would break up their fun. I [was] called into a bar in the Jungle —.

RB: In the Philippines?

CV: Yes. I said to the girl, “What’s the trouble?” All of a sudden, she said “Upstairs! Upstairs!” Me and my partner went upstairs. I said, “You stand by the door and don’t let anybody in or anybody out.” “Okay.” Three Black [fellows] were beating up a fourth Black [fellow]. These were big boys! The night stick they drilled out to [the] center and put a chunk of lead about as big as your thumb in that center. It was about ten inches deep. That lead made it weigh pretty heavy. We walked in there and I took my night stick out and poked the [fellow] in the chest with it. “Up against the wall.” When I poked him with the night stick, he moved because that hurt. The chunk of lead in there made that stick weigh about three and a half pounds. It was pretty heavy. It made the [fellow] wince when I poked him with the night stick. I said, “Up against the wall.” He got up against the wall.

I took the second [fellow], “Up against the wall.” The third [fellow], he was a big boy, six [feet] five [inches], and I told him, “Knock it off.” He drew his fist back. I knew he was going to take a swing at me. I had my nightstick like this [gesturing so as to show pointing the night stick], but when I saw him draw back his fist, I turned the night stick this way [gesturing to show how he turned the stick around to show the handle]. I thought: well, if he’s going to swing at me, I knew he was, and I just timed it right.

RB: Have him swing at the night stick?

CV: Yes. I knew he was going to swing at my face, so I put the night stick up, broke his knuckles.

RB: [Laughter]

CV: You could hear them crack! The [fellow] wanted to scream, but he couldn't because the pain was so bad. I said, "Okay, Mama san [head woman at the bar] what is the problem?" "Those niggers beating up that nigger." It was a Black bar, also she didn't mind calling them niggers. He was hitting on his girlfriend. I said, "Okay, come on sailor." You put the nightstick about halfway, like this, put it in between your legs from behind, turn it, pull up on it. That will make the [fellow] go on his toes.

RB: Gosh! Sure! [Laughter]

[END OF RECORDING FOUR.]

CV: I said, "Okay, sailor. You take a swing at me and I am going to take you down the stairs on your face. You understand me?" "Yes, man, I got you bro."

RB: [Laughter]

CV: I took him down stairs. You have seen in the movies where these MPs [military policemen] and shore patrol come into a bar and they start swinging, hitting people in the head. That is only in the movies. You don't do that in reality because you would kill a [fellow] if you hit them in the head with a night stick. In any case, the paddy wagon was waiting out there full of sailors and Marines. "Any trouble, Velasquez?" "No trouble at all. Take this [fellow] down to headquarters, clean him up and put him upstairs." "Okay." I told the Black [fellow], "I don't want to see you down here again tonight. Do you understand me?" Yes, man, I got you." "Okay." They took him down to headquarters, cleaned him up a little bit, took him up to the main drag and turned him loose.

RB: [Laughter]

CV: I didn't like to put a [fellow] on report when I was on shore patrol because it went on their record. If other shore patrol would see on your record that you tried to hit or had trouble with other shore patrol, they would hound you.

RB: Would they get non-judicial punishment?

CV: No, not if you didn't put it on report.

RB: That is what I mean. In the Navy do they call that, Captain's Mast.

CV: Captain's Mast, yes. NJP [non-judicial punishment]. I didn't want to do that because it would go on a [fellow's] record.

RB: It would hurt them in getting promoted.

CV: I didn't want to ruin anybody's record by putting them on Captain's Mast.

RB: Good. It sounds like you had some interesting times. [Laughter]

CV: Oh, man! After we pulled out of Subic Bay in the Philippines, we went to sea for five months.

RB: What time frame is this? Would you say?

CV: This is 1966. We were at sea for five months and then we pulled into Okinawa, a small base called White Beach. White Beach had a big dance hall and a restaurant. That was really all they had to offer.

RB: Not much!

CV: But that was enough for the sailors. They would go in there, drink their beer and dance in the ballroom. When they [were] hungry they went to the restaurant, ordered, ate and went back to drinking their beer.

RB: [Laughter]

CV: I guess it was about quarter to ten, me and my partner went to the shore patrol watch officer and it was a Marine captain. I said, "Captain, we are going to go to the restaurant and get something to eat." "Okay." We went to the restaurant and ordered. The food was just coming up on the window when we hear. "Shore patrol!" Oh, oh! I said, "Mama San, hold those sandwiches!" "Okay, sailor, I hold for you." We went running. "What's the trouble, officer?" "Inside! Inside!" There were four big Marines squared off against four big sailors.

RB: Oh, no!

CV: We walked in and I said, "Okay, you sailors get over there and sit down." They listened to me. The Marines, you can't do anything with them. You can order them, but they won't do it. I said, "Okay, Marines, trouble is over. No fights tonight." One [fellow] had been drinking. "I was going to whip me a sailor and I guess I will whip you." He was six [feet] five [inches] and coming at me. I was standing there. One of the sailors said, "Hit him, "Chris", hit him!"

RB: [Laughter]

CV: Oh, yes, they try to egg you on!

RB: How tall are you?

CV: How tall?

RB: Yes.

CV: [I am] five [feet] eight [inches].

RB: Five-eight against six-five! Okay!

CV: Can you imagine?

RB: No. You are not an idiot!

CV: The [fellow] is coming at me and I am standing there. Just let him come on. When he gets close enough, I took my right foot and put it on his right knee, hyperextended his leg. [That] stopped him cold.

RB: Really? How did you do that?

CV: How did I do that? It just straightens out the knee. The [fellow] can't move.

RB: With your night stick?

CV: No, with my foot.

RB: With your foot? You kicked his knee?

CV: No, I didn't kick it, I just touched it. If you kicked it, you could hurt the [fellow].

RB: Okay, so you touch it, kind of like when a doctor touches your knee to see your reflex?

CV: Well, no, it is a little bit more difficult than that.

RB: Okay. So you knew what you were doing. You touch his knee with your foot and it hyperextended —.

CV: I put my foot up there and hyperextended his right leg. It stopped him, just cold. All the sailors laughed because the [fellow] looked at his knee and looked at me, looked at his knee and looked at me. Like what happened? The sailors were laughing because they thought it was funny.

RB: [Laughter]

CV: The first thing that you want to do when you know there is trouble coming, is to try and get the [fellow] out of position. Because when he is coming toward you, he is ready to take a swing. You want to get him out of position so he has to redo [re-situate] himself to take a swing at you. I moved him, got him out of position and he came at me again. I know he was expecting [my] right foot to come up, but

this time I took my left foot, put it on his left knee and hyperextended that. It stopped him cold!

RB: [Laughter] Where did you learn that?

CV: Judo and Karate.

RB: Good for you! [Laughter]

CV: The sailors, they are laughing now! They really think it is funny now! Here is a little five-eight [fellow] —.

RB: [Laughter] Taking on a Marine!

CV: Yes!

RB: He doesn't know what is happening! Did he finally back off?

CV: No. He came at me again. I had the night stick in my hand. I had it running my right arm, like this [gesturing to show a nightstick parallel to his arm]. You don't want to hit a [fellow] in the head with it, but I had it in my hand. But if he swung at me, I was [prepared] to put my night stick up so he hits the night stick. He is coming at me and he doesn't know what I am going to do — my right foot or my left foot.

This time, when he got real close, I just swung at his chin, and man, I got it just perfect! He went down like a rock!

RB: Wow! Just with your right fist?

CV: Yes, right fist. Just hit him on the chin and he went down. About that time, the watch officer, the captain, opens the doors. Those Marines snapped to attention right quick. "Attention on deck." Those Marines stood up, they were ramrod straight. I turned around and looked at the sailor, and said to the sailors "Didn't you hear, attention on deck." All the sailors jumped up. I said to the captain, "Sorry, captain, lack of military courtesy."

RB: [Laughter]

CV: He just kind of grinned [laughter] at me. He said, "What is going on, Velasquez?" I wasn't going to tell him that I hit this [fellow] or that he was coming at me. So I just told him that, "This Marine here had a little too much beer, sir, and he slipped on a beer that somebody spilled on the floor." You could see the track of his heel. I didn't tell him that but you could see the track and he conked his head pretty good when he hit the floor. He didn't have a concussion, he's just knocked out. "Are you sure that is what happened, Velasquez?" "Yes, sir."

RB: [Laughter]

CV: So I gained a few points with the Marines. I have to tell you that. They didn't want him [to be reported]. He was an E-6 [Enlisted grade six], so if I would have said that to the captain, they would have busted him. Winging at a shore patrol, you don't do that. He said, "Are you sure that is what happened, Velasquez?" "Yes, sir."

RB: [Laughter]

CV: He turned to the three other Marines that were going to fight, "You two [fellows] take him over to cold water faucet on the pavilion, dunk his head in it, bring him around, take him back to the ship, get him some coffee and I want to see him at 7:30 in my quarters tomorrow morning, sharp."

RB: [Laughter]

CV: "Yes, sir." The two Marines picked up their buddy, dragged him out, went and dunked his head in cold water faucet, made him come around, walked back to the ship and fed him some coffee. They told [him] that, "The shore patrol saved your butt, buddy." They told him what I said. "You better get that story straight tomorrow with the captain. He will ask you what you did. Just tell him that you were walking out there and you slipped on beer someone spilled." That was that incident there. He came to the photo lab the next day and said, "What did you hit me with, anyway?"

RB: [Laughter]

CV: He said, "The whole left side of my jaw is sore." I told him, "I am sorry. I had my night stick in my hand and I couldn't get rid of it. You were coming at me." He said, "Yes, I am sorry." I said, "That is alright. The beer was doing all the talking."

RB: That was pretty nice that he came and kind of apologized and appreciated you not making it worse. [Laughter]

CV: Yes. Then we went out to sea for another five months. Then we pulled into Sasebo, Japan.

RB: Back to Sasebo, Japan.

CV: Yes. I was on shore patrol again, the first night out there. Everybody was having fun. You could hear all the laughter and hurrahs going on. Everybody was having fun. We would just stick our head in the bar, "Mama San, if you got trouble just give us a yell." "Okay, shore patrol."

RB: [Laughter]

CV: About quarter to ten I said to my mate, I said, "Let's go get —." In Japan they serve corn dogs on a stick. "Let's go over and get us a corn dog." "Okay." We ate a corn dog and ordered another one. Just as she was bringing them up, we hear "Shore Patrol!" I said, "Mama San, hold those corn dogs." "Okay." We took off running. I said, "Mama San, what's the problem?" "Inside! Inside!" "Okay." So we go in there. First thing I did was I looked at the Mama San who ran the bar and I went like this [gesturing at his neck to cut the music]. In other words, cut off the jukebox. I said, "What's the trouble?" She goes, "He don't want to pay. He don't want to pay." I went over to the [fellow] and I said, "What's the problem, sailor?" "She charges too much." I said, "Yes? You don't look like a seagoing sailor to me." "I ain't." "How long you been stationed here?" "Fourteen months." "Then you ought to know the price of beer. Take a look around you. Most of these [fellows], we are on the same ship. They might think it is kind of high, the price, too, but they pay. You know why? Because in four days we are going to be going out to sea again. And they are going to dry out. So if you don't want to come and pay these prices, I suggest that you go to the commissary or the package store and get yourself a six pack or a case of beer and drink it in the barracks. But don't come out here causing trouble. They don't like to see me come in here. The jukebox is turned off. You spoiled their fun." He is just sitting there.

RB: [Laughter]

CV: They served long neck bottles of beer there. He took a drink and put it down. When he put it down his hand goes like this, like he was going to use that beer bottle for a club. I said, "Sailor, keep your fingers tight around the neck of that bottle or I am going to break every bone in your hand. You understand me?" He is not paying attention to me. I took my night stick and whacked it down on the table. It was like a shot gun going off.

RB: [Laughter] Did that get everybody's attention?

CV: Real quick! His hand was on the neck of the bottle and when I hit that table, his hand went to his lap right away.

RB: Wow! You meant business!

CV: I said, "Sailor, I will tell you what I am going to do for you. I am going to give you a chance to square yourself away with Mama San. That clock up there say two minutes to ten. At exactly 10:20 I am going to come back in here. If you haven't squared yourself with Mama San, it doesn't matter to me how you leave this establishment, feet first or walking." He was looking at me and his buddy was looking at me. I said, "Do you understand me?" "Yes." "Okay." I turned around and left, me and my buddy left. When we came back, it was 10:18, are we going

in my partner said? “No, I am waiting until 10:20. I told them I would be back at 10:20. At exactly 10:20 we are walking in there.” “Okay.” So at 10:20 we went in there. Mama San said, “Okay, shore patrol. He paid. He paid.” “Okay.”

RB: [Laughter]

CV: “Okay, Mama San.” She said, “You come by tomorrow I’ll buy you a beer.” “I don’t drink, Mama San.” “Okay, I’ll buy you a Pepsi.” “Okay.”

RB: [Laughter] That’s great!

CV: I gotta tell you this. Well, no, I shouldn’t tell you this because it is going on a video, isn’t it?

RB: I’ll tell you what we will stop the video. I want to hear it.

[VIDEO TURNED OFF. END OF RECORDING FIVE.]

RB: We are back talking with “Chris” Velasquez. You were in Vietnam for eight different assignments. Something like that.

CV: No, six different assignments.

RB: Six different assignments. Two and four. About what time frame did you finally leave Vietnam for good?

CV: 1972.

RB: You were there from 1964 to 1972, off and on?

CV: Yes.

RB: Wow! And on the ship. Did you ever make it back home to Ohio during that time?

CV: Let’s see, yes, one time, well, no, twice. I got wounded.

RB: You did?

CV: Bad! I got wounded three times. First two times weren’t bad.

RB: Enemy wounds?

CV: Yes.

RB: Did you get a Purple Heart? Three of them?

CV: Yes, three of them.

RB: Wow! Okay. Tell about that.

CV: The first two wounds were not bad. Can you see this little knot right here?
[Gesturing to his right index finger.]

RB: Yes, I do.

CV: That was shrapnel there. I had some on my wrist and I had some in my thigh. The doctor said those would work their way out in seven years. They lied. It took like forty years for the shrapnel to come out of this finger.

RB: Wow! Where was that where it happened?

CV: That was up at what they called Dongtta. The Army was always camping at the area they called The Rockpile. Just explosions and little shrapnel got my hand. It stung like crazy. I didn't pay any mind because I was busy doing my job. The [fellows] thought, "Man, you crazy." "You tell me that all the time, you crazy. Why do you [fellows] say that?" "Because you are." "Why do you say that?" "Well, because you shoot Charlie with your camera and we shoot with our M-16s. How smart is that?" "Well, it is my job."

RB: [Laughter]

CV: "To hell with your job! Forget that and shoot Charlie with your weapon."

RB: [Laughter]

CV: "Can't do that. I gotta do my job." The third time I got wounded, a piece of shrapnel cut me from my hip bone to my sternum.

RB: Wow! That is long.

CV: If I had weighed then what I weigh now, I would have been dust already.

RB: Yes.

CV: I didn't even know I was hit. That little piece of shrapnel stuck in my sternum.

RB: It went inside your body? It didn't just scrape on the outside?

CV: It just scraped the outside, but it didn't —.

RB: Lodge in your shirt?

CV: Yes.

RB: Where did this happen?

CV: This was in, where the heck was it? It was out in the jungle. I can't remember what the area was called.

RB: That sounds like a more serious injury. Did you need special attention?

CV: Yes. A corpsman came up to me. I thought somebody hit me in the chest. It was the piece of shrapnel lodged in my sternum. I just kept on shooting with my camera. A corpsman came to me and said — it wasn't a corpsman, it was a medic. The Army has medics and Navy has corpsman — "Lay down! Lay down! You are hit! You are hit!" I said, "What?" I turned around and looked at him. I looked down and the bottom flap, where the shrapnel cut me was open like that. I looked down and I could see my intestines and all my guts.

RB: Was it bleeding pretty bad?

CV: Oh, man! Heck yeah

RB: Blood all over your chest?

CV: Blood all over my self, all over the front of my pants. I thought I was peeing my pants!

RB: Yes, all wet.

CV: I remember thinking: my bladder must have been full because I am still peeing.

RB: [Laughter]

CV: It was bleeding, actually.

RB: You were all wet with blood.

CV: "Lay down! Lay down! You are hit! You are hit! Lay down!" He fixed me up as best he could with battlefield dressing. Then he called for a stretcher. I really thought I had seen my last sunrise.

RB: Is that right?

CV: He called for a stretcher. Two [fellows] came over and put me on a stretcher and said, "Take him to the medevac where the chopper is coming." "Okay." So they took me there. I thought: why in the heck are they wasting all this time on me. I

am dead. They took me there. I kept my arm like this, keeping the flap closed because I didn't want my innards to come out. The chopper came in. They loaded me on and went back to base camp.

RB: Did they have to stitch you up?

CV: No, they didn't stitch me up.

RB: No?

CV: What they did was they cleaned off the blood. After they cleaned off the blood they took alcohol and put it in a sponge and just wiped the flaps off. Once they were dry they put tape on them.

RB: Okay, and let the skin grow back together?

CV: Yes. That is what they were doing in those days. Because that was a lot quicker than stitching. They had too many wounded. They just used ordinance tape.

RB: Did it leave a scar?

CV: Oh, yes. I will show it to you before you go.

RB: Okay.

CV: I kept thinking: why are they wasting all this time on me? I am dead.

RB: You really thought you were dead?

CV: I really thought I had seen my last sunrise.

RB: Had you already seen some of your fellow military [fellows] die?

CV: Oh, yes. My best friend died. My best friend was killed. He said, "Chris." I said, "Corpsman! Corpsman! Get your ass over here, Corpsman." "On my way." My friend said, "'Chris,' corpsman is for the living. I am dead." I used to call him dumb and ugly, I said, "Shut up, dumb and ugly." He chuckled. He was from Wisconsin. We used to tease him all the time. "Hey, Barry, where are you from?" "Wis-can-sin." "No, man, Wis-con-sin." "Yes, that is what I said, Wis-can-sin."

RB: [Laughter]

CV: "You don't even know how to pronounce your own state's name." I used to tease him all the time. When he was laying there he said, "'Chris,' I have a joke for you." "Okay." Can I tell this joke?

RB: Is it off-color?

CV: Yes.

RB: Okay, we are going to stop again.

[VIDEO IS TURNED OFF. END OF RECORDING SIX.]

CV: I didn't know that he had written down that he wanted me to escort him if he got killed. I am sitting there crying and trying to laugh at the same time. I could just see the life slipping away through his eyes. It was terrible. I found out what the phrase, "The world stops for no man," meant. It was quite sobering for me. I went back to base camp and saw all the [fellows] carrying on like normal. That is what it meant. That is what the phrase meant. Life goes on as normal.

RB: You still got a mission to do. You still have to stay alive. I can imagine.

CV: It was pretty hard for me. I knew him for like eight years. We were real close.

RB: What was his name?

CV: Barry, what the heck was his last name? Barry, I can't think of his last name.

RB: No problem.

CV: He has written me down to escort his body home.

RB: So you did?

CV: The sergeant said, "Velasquez, he put you down to escort his body. You better get on that chopper." "Okay." I gave the camera to my third man in line and I said, "Barry is in charge." I ran to the chopper, got on, went back to the base camp, got cleaned up, went on the plane with his body. Went back to Kenosha, Wisconsin.

RB: Did you meet his parents?

CV: Oh, yes. They already knew me. He had written to them about me. We had pictures together so they knew what I looked like. When I got back to Wisconsin, there was a sergeant. I said, "Sergeant, I am escorting my buddy's body home." He said, "Yes, are you Velasquez?" "Yes, sir." "Okay, there is a hearse out back waiting for you. There is somebody there to make sure you are the right [fellow]. You drive to Kenosha, which is about eighty miles away. They will tell you how to get to his house." "Okay." I went out and found the hearse. The [fellow] said, "You have to go to Kenosha. This is where he lives." He gave me the address and showed me how to get there. I took the body home. I pulled into the driveway and

his mom and dad came running out of the house. The mother was crying.
[Emotional] Sorry I'm getting emotional.

RB: That is okay. That is a pretty intense memory.

CV: Yes, it [is]. The dad was crying. He said, ""Chris," —." "I am sorry mom, I hate to be [here] for these bad times, [emotional] but he put me down to bring his body home." His dad said, "Well, you can take him down to the mortuary. I will go with you." "Okay." He got in the hearse with me and we took him down to the mortuary. They took care of him. He was dressed and ready to go, but they had to put the finishing touches on him. They did. It was kind of a sad time.

RB: [Did] you finish up Vietnam in 1972?

CV: I finished up in 1972 after I got wounded [badly]. They medevacked me to the Philippines. I woke up and I am telling you — they kept wanting to give me morphine. I didn't want morphine because I knew [fellows] who got hooked on it. I didn't want to get hooked on it. I would stand the pain. The pain was something awful. It was really awful. I was sitting, squirming, trying to find a comfortable position on my stretcher. I couldn't find a comfortable spot. "Do you want morphine?" "No, I don't want any morphine, doc. But I will tell you what I do want. Call over to Hush 42 and tell the bishop over there to come and give me a blessing." He said, "What?" "I want the bishop to give me a blessing. Just call over, they know what I am talking about." "Okay." He went and pretty soon he came back and said, "He said he would be right over." Pretty soon the bishop showed up. They administered to me. I am telling you within five minutes I was asleep.

RB: Wow! That is amazing!

CV: The pain just subsided and I fell asleep. I woke up on the airplane, four hours later. I knew at that very moment that I was going to live.

RB: You got that assurance?

CV: Yes. Like I said, I woke up and I knew at that moment I was going to live because they wouldn't go to all the trouble if I wasn't going to live. I said to the nurse who was checking my IV [intravenous] bottle, "Ma'am, where are we going?" "We are going to Clark Field Angeles City [the Philippines]. Have you been there?" "Yes, mam. I was stationed in Sangley Point, Manila Bay. So I know all about it. Clark Field, I knew all about it." "We will be there in about three hours." "Okay." The song came on the intercom. *Brown Sugar* by the Rolling Stones. That was kind of special. We landed [at] Clark Field and they put all of us wounded [fellows] in a barracks room. There must have been forty beds in there.

A doctor came to me one day, about a month later. He said, "Let me check your scar." He lifted up a little corner of it, "Oh, yes, it is getting along nicely. Yes, it is really looking good." He took the piece of ordinance tape and just ripped it off.

RB: Oh, man! Oh! Oh!

CV: I thought he was going to open that wound again! Oh, man! I let out a scream! "Yowl!" He said, "You alright?" I said, "Hell, yes, I am alright!"

RB: [Laughter]

CV: Geez! "Your bedside manner really sucks, doc!" He just kind of chuckled, "Sorry!"

RB: Right!

CV: "It is better to rip it off instead of taking it off slow." "Okay." "Yes, that is coming along real nice. Okay, we are going to leave you like this. We will have to wait another three or four days, maybe a week, five days, and then we will see if you can go ambulatory. In other words, if you can walk around." "Okay." Every day a nurse would come give me a sponge bath. They would use that surgical soap and clean off the wound. A week later they said, "You can go ambulatory." "Alright." "But you have to come back by 5:00 p.m. and have your evening meal here so you can sleep here." "Okay." I would go out and be gone all day, come back at 4:30 p.m., take a shower, get into my hospital gown, crawl in bed and be ready for my evening meal there. That went on for a couple of weeks.

RB: So it wasn't five days?

CV: It was five days that they kept the tape off of me and were checking me. After five days, they said I could go ambulatory now. For two weeks, I was out during the day and come back and have a meal there. I picked up the dialect of the Filipinos where I was stationed.

RB: Really?

CV: I have forgot a lot of it now. I haven't used it in years. I went to the Exchange and bought me a nice horse jacket. I bought me three long sleeve white shirts and three short sleeve white shirts with button down collars. I have always had a thing about the continental shirts. I ordered a tailor-made suit. I took a cab to the gate, got out, and there was my little Hispanic nurse. She and three other girls were trying to dicker with the [fellow] to get whatever they wanted. I went out there and started talking to them in Tagalog. I said, "Hey, if you deal with them," I said this in Tagalog. [Phrase in Tagalog]. "Yes, true?" I said, "Yes." I told him that meant that if you deal with them, other GIs will come. "They will want to deal with you." He said, "True?" I said, "True." He said, "Okay." I said to the girls,

“What do you girls want?” “I want this over there.” The other girl said, “I want that and I want that. But he wants too much. I told him I would give him \$5.00.” They were big things, they were small things. I spoke to this guy [in Tagalog].

RB: What does that mean?

CV: I said, “How much do you want?” “For what?” “That.” “Okay.” “\$8.00.” [in Tagalog] “Too much! Too much!” He says, “How much?” [in Tagalog]. “\$5.00.” “Okay. Go ahead.” I got the girls for what they wanted to pay. They were happy. They got what they wanted.

RB: That was nice of you.

CV: [Laughter] I was trying to get close to my little Hispanic girlfriend!

RB: Okay, that works. You wanted to impress her.

CV: “What did you tell him?” “I just told him that if dealt with you, other GIs would come running when they see that he was dealing with you girls.” “Okay.” One of the [fellows] said, “Hey buddy, can you help me?” So I go over and help him. They got what they wanted. Everybody got what they wanted.

RB: [Laughter] That is great!

CV: As we started to walk away, the woman said, “Young man!” My girlfriend goes, “That is the commanding general’s wife.”

RB: Oh, no! [Laughter]

CV: “Yes, ma’am.” She goes, “Can you help me?” “Well, I can try.” “I want to get those elephants over there. He wants \$75.00 each.” “I will see, ma’am.” I went over to the [fellow] [in Tagalog]. He goes, “\$75.00.” [In Tagalog] “Too much! Too much!” “How much?” I said, “\$40.00.” [In Tagalog] “Too little! Too little!” I said, “Okay, \$45.00.” [In Tagalog] “Okay.” I went back to the woman and said, “Well ma’am, I couldn’t do better than \$90.00.” “What? Each?” I said, “No, ma’am, for both.” “Both?” “I will take it.”

RB: [Laughter]

CV: “Oh, good.” I told the [fellow], “Okay, buddy, [in Tagalog].” Him and I go back there and the general comes, [the Filipino] dusts the elephants off and wraps them in some paper. I picked one up and he picked up the other one. I said, “General, do you want to put these in your trunk?” He goes, “Yes.” “Okay.” So we put them in the trunk, close the trunk and she was happy. Two elephants for \$90.00!

RB: Better than \$150.00. [Laughter] That was good! You were the hero!

CV: I am telling you I gained more points with the little Hispanic nurse. I said to the general, I called him sir, "Sir, we are going to take the girls over to that restaurant over there to get something to eat. They have good food there if you would like to join us." He goes, "Oh, okay. I could take three of the nurses." "Well, that is alright, me and one of the nurses are going to walk over there." "Okay." He puts the nurses in the car, in the back seat and they go off. We are not that far behind them, not even a half a block. We went in there and I ordered. His wife said, "Do you like chicken adobo?" "Yes, ma'am. Chicken adobo and sweet and sour chicken." "Okay." Pancit, get some fried rice. Pancit pantone is a kind of a noodle dish [with] some veggies in it. I always liked that. Filipinos are the only ones who know how to make fried rice in the Orient.

RB: Is that right?

CV: Japanese, Chinese, [inaudible] and Vietnamese they don't know how to make fried rice. Their rice is all dry. Filipino rice is always juicy. I am telling you.

RB: Did you get your suit?

CV: After we ate, I went to the tailor and ordered my suit.

RB: Do you remember the general's name?

CV: No, I don't.

RB: He was the commanding general for Clark Field in 1972?

CV: Yes.

RB: I might be able to look him up. After you ate you went over and got a suit made and you knew you were going back to the States, so you wanted a tailor-made suit?

CV: Just to wear.

RB: Sure.

CV: I wasn't going back to the States yet. I still had another month to go there. After I finished in the hospital, they give you thirty days basket leave. In other words, they give you thirty days off and you don't pay for it.

RB: Right. What did you call that? Basket leave?

CV: Basket leave.

RB: It is in the basket and they don't charge you for it.

CV: What happens is, you take your request chit [leave request] and they all sign it and it is in the outgoing basket.

RB: Got it! Got it!

CV: They put that there and if something happens to you, say you break a leg or something, you get hit or whatever, they put that in. So the Navy will cover the cost. That is why it is called basket leave. I had thirty days coming so I was still going to be there for another month and a half. I had a couple of dates with my little Hispanic girlfriend. She said, "What I really want to do, I want to go to Manila." I said, "Okay. But you can't just go to Manila for just a weekend, you got go there for at least a week or two weeks." "I have two weeks coming in ten days, vacation." I said, "Okay, we will go then." "Alright, how are we going to get there?" "I will show you."

I knew all the ins and outs. So I went down to the terminal and I befriended a [fellow] down there. I told him, "Yes, I am going to take my girlfriend and go to Manila." "Oh, just come by and I will put you on the yellow sheet." "But I want to make sure I don't get bumped off." "No problem." "Okay." So when it came time that she could go, I told her, "Wear slacks and get you some tennis shoes. You don't wear high-heels, nothing like that." "Okay." "Just slacks, tennis shoes, a nice blouse and we will go to Manila." "Alright." "Pack a bag, nice evening dress, a couple nice dresses, skirts if you want, and that will be just fine." Of course, my suit only took four or five days to make. My suit was already made. I would go in the suit, take my sports jacket and my white shirts. I took her to a really fancy restaurant, really nice restaurant. She just loved it! I was making points with her! [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

CV: I told her, "Okay, do you want to go dance?" "Yeah!" So we went dancing. Do you know what Jaialai is?

RB: That is like a gambling game, isn't it? Or horse racing?

CV: No, not horse racing. It is a game that is played — they take this ball, throw it against the wall and the other player catches it, is what they call a basket, they call it sesta, S-E-S-T-A. The object is to catch it. You have to be going towards the wall when you catch it. Then you throw it and the other [fellow] catches it. Jaialai is really a popular game in Spain. The Basque [people] start out playing it when they are young. It is like playing baseball over here. [Youngsters] play in Little League. In Spain, the Basque [youngsters] play Jaialai when they are young. By the time they grow up, they get good at it. The same thing with baseball players here, they go on and play professional. They go out all over the world. In Mexico

you will find a Jaialai frontone. In Florida you will find a Jaialai frontone. In South America you find them. Players go all over the world from Spain to play Jaialai.

RB: I just looked that up. They spell J-A-I-A-L-A-I.

CV: Something like that, yes.

RB: “A sport involving a ball bounced off of a wall space by accelerating it to high speeds with a hand held device. It is a variation of Basque pelota.”

CV: Yes.

RB: So you went and saw some Jaialai?

CV: She saw Jaialai for the first time. You can bet on it.

RB: Yes.

CV: But I never liked to bet on it because I [get] irritated. You don’t know whether the players are going to win or not. It is just one of those chance games.

RB: [Laughter]

CV: But I never bet on it. She said, “I think I will bet on it.” I said, “No, don’t do it.”

RB: [Laughter]

CV: She said, “Really?” I said, “Yes. Because the [fellow] you think is going to win doesn’t come close to winning.” “Okay.”

RB: Did you have a good time in Manila?

CV: Yes, we danced. I took her to places that she didn’t expect were there. Afterward we stayed at the Hilton. Prices weren’t bad in those days, \$22.00 a day. I had a ton of money then, too! Every time I would go overseas on deployment, I would never draw a full paycheck. I would only draw \$20.00 to \$30.00, what I needed for my toiletries, soap, shampoo, shaving —.

RB: Did you save the rest?

CV: Just leave it on the books. By the time I got back to the states, I had \$1,400 or \$1,500 saved up. I had a ton of money so I took her to places that she was just ecstatic over.

RB: [Laughter] That is nice.

CV: Afterwards she said, “I am ready to go back to home.” “Okay.” So we went back to the hotel. We ate guacamole all night. We had a lot of fun!

RB: Good! Did you finally get sent back to the states?

CV: Eventually, yes.

RB: Where did you go?

CV: Where did I go? I went to North Island [San Diego, California].

RB: San Diego [California].

CV: Yes. One of the [fellows] said, “Didn’t I see your name on the wounded list?” “Yes.” He started questioning on it and I told him [about it]. The [fellow] said, “Well, you got a Silver Star, too.” “Yes.” “What did you do?” “Something stupid.”

RB: [Laughter]

CV: “What was that?” “I attacked a machine gun nest with two grenades.” “What?”

RB: [Laughter]

CV: “That is what I said — something stupid.”

RB: A machine gun what?

CV: A machine gun nest.

RB: Oh, nest. You got a Silver Star for that. You got three Purple Hearts. Any other medals like that, you got?

CV: No, just a good conduct medal. No, that was it.

RB: That was pretty good. For a photographer! [Laughter]

CV: Yes.

RB: You ended up getting a disability discharge from the [United States] Navy in 1974.

CV: No, 1976.

RB: Okay, 1976. How did you get blind?

CV: I had a tumor in the pituitary gland.

RB: Really?

CV: You know where that is at?

RB: No, I don't.

CV: The pituitary gland is located right where your optic nerves cross in the middle of your head.

RB: I never knew that.

CV: The right optic nerve goes to the left eye and the left optic nerve goes to the right eye. Where they cross, in the middle of the head, is where the pituitary gland is. The pituitary gland is the master gland of the body. The tumor was there. The tumor was so big that it was putting pressure on the optic nerve. You don't do that to a nerve, because, actually, you end up killing it. That is exactly what happened. When the tumor hemorrhaged it killed the optic nerve.

RB: It quit doing its job of letting your eyes send images to the brain?

CV: Yes. When you look at something, you look at it and the message goes to the brain. What is that I am looking at? The brain tells you, okay, that is a naked girl!

RB: It makes sense of it.

CV: Okay. That is all in a heartbeat. It only takes an instant for the brain to do that. My optic nerve doesn't even work, so I could look at a naked girl, or a wall and don't know what I am looking at.

RB: The brain never gets the message.

CV: Correct.

RB: Wow! Did that happen all of a sudden, the tumor? Did it grow for a while?

CV: No, it came on — the doctor said it had to be in there for at least five years. But it only started doing damage the last year. I had terrible headaches. As a matter fact, I started taking two Excedrins in the morning and two Excedrins in the afternoon. Pretty soon it went to four Excedrins in the morning and four Excedrins in the afternoon, then to six and then to eight. When I reached eight, I said no, this can't go on. I went to the eye doctor at the Balboa Naval Hospital [San Diego, California]. He was an optometrist, not an ophthalmologist. If he had been an ophthalmologist he would have known what it was. He told me, "You just need

glasses.” I said, “Sir, every time I put on the glasses you gave me, my headaches get worse.” He looked at me, “Are you questioning my decisions?” “No, sir, I am just telling you what happens.” “I think you are goofing off. I don’t want to see you in here again. You understand me?” “Yes, sir.”

RB: He was not so helpful.

CV: I never went and picked up the glasses he ordered for me. I just went back to work. I had the duty one night. We were playing a game, called Spades, a popular game in the Navy. There were four of us. The girl that was sitting across from me, looked at me and — I took my cards and folded them up real neat, put them face down on the table — she says “Chris,” are you alright?” I said, “No, I don’t feel too good.” The tumor hemorrhaged at that very moment.

RB: No kidding!

CV: I just passed out. They panicked! They didn’t know what the heck was wrong, so they ran across the street to a small dispensary there. Told the [fellow], “Our section leader just passed out. We don’t know why or what.” “Okay.” A couple of corpsmen came over with a portable [tool kit] that they have and checked me out. “He doesn’t have a concussion.” “Something is wrong with him. He just turned ashen and passed out.” They called the doctor. The doctor said, “Take him to Balboa.” “Okay.” They took me to Balboa. I woke up two days later. There was a catheter on my right, a commander on my left and two corpsmen at the foot of the bed. “Don’t worry, sailor, we are going to find out what is wrong with you.” I said, “I know what is wrong with me. I am blind. That idiot you got working down in the eye clinic didn’t know what the hell he was talking about.” “What do you mean?” “He told me I was goofing off. Said he didn’t want to see me down there again. So I didn’t go back there. But I knew that something was wrong. He just kept telling me that I needed glasses. What I needed to see was an ophthalmologist, not an optometrist.” “We are still going to find out what is wrong with you.” I said, “No, I would rather you just send me to the VA [Veterans Administration] Hospital.” He turned to the two corpsmen, “Get him dressed and take him to the VA hospital.” “Yes, sir.” They got me dressed back in my uniform and I went to the VA hospital. I was there for two and a half years.

RB: Really?

CV: Yes.

RB: And you never saw again?

CV: No.

RB: Wow! You were in the Navy for fourteen years?

CV: Yes.

RB: Then they gave you a disability discharge?

CV: Yes, medical disability discharge.

RB: Did you end up going back to Ohio after that?

CV: I went back to Ohio and saw my family. My dad knew that I was feeling sorry for myself and I really was.

RB: Were you?

CV: Yes. My brothers were out there playing in the backyard. "Hey, do you want to play a dart game with us?" "No, that is okay." I didn't want to do that. My dad said, "Do you remember where the water trough was for the animals, the cows?" "Yes." "Go over to it." I went over to it. "Stick your finger in the water." I stuck my finger in the water. "How long did that hole stay in the water?" "Come on, dad, you know it didn't stay. As soon as I took my finger out it filled in." He said, "Well, that is how long your life on this earth is going to be, boy. When you get older all you are going to have is memories. So you had better start making memories and stop feeling sorry for yourself."

RB: Wow!

CV: I thought about that and thought about it. You know, he is right. Your life on this earth isn't really that long.

RB: Yes.

CV: So I became a changed person after that. Yep, I started making memories.

RB: All this time when you were in the military, you were dating and seeing women, did you finally get married?

CV: I did.

RB: How did you meet your wife? [Susan Chamberlain]

CV: I met her at a wedding, at the dance. I asked her to dance and we danced. We had such a good time that I said, "Hey, do you want to go out tomorrow?" She goes, "Oh, okay." We went out the next day and after that we just became inseparable.

RB: Wow! That's great! You hit it off. She liked you. You liked her.

CV: Yes. We had a good time together. We got married. She didn't like the Navy. It takes a special woman to be a military wife because you're gone on deployment and she has got to take care of the [children] by herself and take care of everything. That is tough on them.

RB: You were in the Navy when you met her?

CV: Yes.

RB: When did you get married?

CV: We got married in 1966.

RB: Okay, so that early. Did you end up getting [a] divorce?

CV: Yes. Like I say, she didn't like the Navy.

RB: That happens. When you went back to Ohio, you were single, divorced and your dad said [to] start making some memories for the rest of your life. What kind of things did you end up doing? You ended up learning braille, I understand.

CV: I did. I went to the Blind Center in Palo Alto [California] at the VA hospital out there. They teach you how to read braille, how to use the computer, taught you how to shop for yourself. [Part] of your graduation is to cook a meal.

RB: Is that right?

CV: Yes. Your graduation test you had to cook a meal for four people. I chose my favorite four people, cooked for them and they loved it.

RB: You ended up going to BYU [Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah County, Utah].

CV: After I got retired out of the Navy, my voc-rehab [vocational rehabilitation] counselor at the VA said, "You ought to go to school, "Chris"." I said, "No, "Jim, I am too dumb."

RB: [Laughter]

CV: He didn't argue with me or nothing. One day me and my roommate were sitting there watching TV [television]. He was watching and I was listening. He said, "There is a car coming up the driveway." "There is?" "Yes." I got up and stood at the door and said, "Tell me what the car license is senior." He told me. "That sounds like a government car." I said, "Maybe that is my voc-rehab counselor." And that is who it was. He came in the house. I said, "Have a seat, Jim." He said, "Mexican, I want you to go to school." "Jim, I told you I am too stupid." He said, "No, you are not. To go to photo school you only needed 164 on your GCT, ARI [Navy General Classification Test and Arithmetic Reasoning Test]. And I checked your record and you scored 192. So you are way past that. So you are not too stupid! You just think you are. That is because you didn't want to study. I want you to go to school. I have this recorder here and I am going to give you a little card that you can charge me whatever you want, school supplies. Books, tapes, whatever you want." "Okay." I went to school and learned how to operate the recorder. I taped all my lectures. I went to school and I studied.

RB: You went to Provo?

CV: No, I went to a small, what do you call it?

RB: A vocational school?

CV: No. It was a small college.

RB: Where?

CV: In San Diego. Southwestern was the name of the college [at Chula Vista, California].

RB: Okay.

CV: It was a, oh, shoot, I can't even think of the word. It was a junior college. Lower division education.

RB: Exactly.

CV: I took a history class. He said, "Just take one class. If you like it, next year you can take a full load or whatever you want, take two or three classes, subjects." "Okay." I went and took history and the professor lectured for an hour and fifty minutes. He said, "I don't want any interruptions. That is the way it is." "Okay." He would write on the chalk board something. I said, "Sir, could you tell me what you wrote on the chalk board so I can record it?" He said, "Get somebody to read it for you." I thought: that is kind of rude. Finally, the girl sitting next to me said, "I will write it down for you." I said, "Okay, number them." "Okay." So she wrote them down and she numbered them. I left a space on my recorder [so there] would be plenty of room to record whatever was said.

RB: Someone would later read it?

CV: Yes. To get an A in his class, you had to do a book report. I chose the *Battle of Gettysburg*. I made the report and took it over to a buddy of mine and had him put it in braille. Have you ever seen a braille book?

RB: I think so. It has all the dots on the pages.

CV: Yes, but the pages are ten by ten and the cover is about a quarter of an inch thick,

RB: Right. I think I have seen one.

CV: I had two of those for my book report. At Southwestern [College], the first bell you had five minutes to get to class. The second bell, you had two minutes to get to class. [When] the third bell rang, you were already late. I waited for the second bell to go off, I waited outside the door. When the second bell went off I opened the door and went in. Everybody was at their desk. I went over and dropped my braille book report on his desk. He says, "Cresencio, what is this?" I said, "That is my book report, sir." He picked it up, opened the pages real slow. He said, "This is all in braille." I said, "Yes." He said, "I can't read braille." I said, "Get somebody to read it for you."

RB: [Laughter]

CV: The same thing you used to tell me all the time.

RB: You had your job to do, now he had his job to do. [Laughter]

CV: That is right. The whole class busted out laughing! He gave me a C for the course. I said that is not right. We had one test in the first half of the semester. Then we had two quizzes for the half of the semester, then another test three-quarters of the

way during the semester, two tests at the end for the finals. So that's six tests. I got five As and one B.

RB: Well, that is not right. What's up with that?

CV: I thought, heck, I am going to contest this. So I contested it. When you contest a professor's grade, they get somebody in the same subject, history. He went in there first. After he finished I went in. They said to me, "You mean to tell us that your book report is in braille?" "Yes, sir." "And it is on the Battle of Gettysburg." "Yes, sir, it is." He said, "Okay, John, open it and read whatever page you are on." This [fellow] named John, opened it and started reading about the attack of Little Round Top. "Okay, go halfway down in the book and read what is on there." "Okay." He went half way down and the attack on Stone Bridge. "Okay." He said, "Now go to the next book." Same thing. He opened it up and started reading about the Confederates charging across trying to get the English soldiers who were on top of the hill. He said, "Okay, go down about half way through the book." He came to Pickett's charge [and] he read it. "Okay, Velasquez, we will notify you of your grade." I thought, "okay".

RB: He just read little bits and pieces of your [report].

CV: He didn't read the whole thing.

RB: What grade did you get on the book report?

CV: I got an A on that. When they finally notified me of my final [grade], it was an A.

RB: Okay, that made sense.

CV: I got an A for my report, I got five As and one B. You balance that out and heck, it sounds like an A.

RB: That is right!

CV: That is what they gave me.

RB: You went two years at Southwestern [College]?

CV: No one year.

RB: One year. Okay.

CV: Then I was looking for upper division education. San Diego State was just too spread out. Most of the students either rode their bikes or drove their cars.

RB: That is right.

CV: I couldn't do either one, so I had to look for a place that was more confined, a smaller campus. I was thinking about going up to, I can't think of the name of the college.

RB: In California?

CV: Yes. I was thinking about going there. I was in Elder's Quorum one day and one of the [fellows] said, "You ought to go check out BYU." We happened to be going up there for a family reunion. The people I was staying with — I said, "Can you show me around the campus?" "Sure. I work there." "Oh, can you take off?" I can take off whenever I want." "How about tomorrow?" "Okay." What time?" "Come about 9:00 [a.m.] and I will show you around the campus." "Okay." He showed me around the campus the next day and I really liked it. It was a little spread out, but it wasn't so bad that I couldn't walk in ten minutes you have between classes. I decided to go to BYU. I sold my house, sold everything. Moved up lock, stock and barrel!

RB: What time period was this? Do you recall?

CV: 1980.

RB: I was at BYU the same time as you.

CV: You were?

RB: Yes. I went to law school in 1977-1978, went on a mission, came back in January 1981 and I graduated from law school in August of 1982.

CV: I was thinking about going to law school. I was already signed up, ready to go. Social Security came by and offered me a job. I thought, I had been in law school in California at Western State [Western State College of Law, Irvine, California]. I really wanted to go to law school. Then I thought, well, they offered me a job, paid me good money, they offered me \$26,000.00 a year. That was good money for me.

RB: For sure.

CV: So I thought, well, okay, I took the job. No sense in putting my brain through all that.

RB: Yes, you probably could have done, but it would have been a lot of work.

CV: So I took the job and forgot about law school. I worked for Social Security for six years, no, seven years. Then I had a stroke.

RB: Oh, man!

CV: The stroke put me in a coma for fifteen days. It was a bad stroke. They just retired me out. I had coupled my Navy time with Social Security time. It was working for the government, so I could do it. I just had to pay x-amount of dollars to hook them up together. So they retired me out at twenty-six years on social security.

RB: So you got a social security OPM or federal civil service retirement.

CV: I got that.

RB: And you had a medical disability.

CV: From Uncle Sam. I was receiving good money.

RB: Yes.

CV: Can't complain about that.

RB: When did you graduate? Do you recall the year?

CV: From BYU? In 1990.

RB: That is right. You told me that. Then you worked for six years after that?

CV: For seven years.

RB: Where were you working for Social Security [Administration]?

CV: I was in Provo. First, I started in Provo then all I did was handle the telephones. Any Hispanics on the phone, I would take their call and help them. I was what they called a service representative. A service representative — if you are having problems with Social Security you go to your service rep first. If he can't help you, then you go to, darn it, what do you call it?

RB: An ombudsman or something?

CV: No, you go to a, I can't think of the term, but anyway they are the ones who take care of the records. So you send it to them. I had a list —

[END OF RECORDING SEVEN.]

CV: — no, we did it by the alphabet. This person handled six people, the next person handled another six people, so on and so forth. I had the names of what letters they handled. Somebody started the name with a B, I went to the person who handled the Bs, so on and so forth. I checked the list at the end of the day, I would take it over to the people and they would call those folks and try to help them.

RB: I see.

CV: They opened an office down here in St. George. They didn't have a Spanish speaking person down here. So every time they had a Spanish-speaking person in the office they used to call me up north. And I would help them. The boss said, "You know what "Chris," I think I am going to send you down to St. George."

RB: [Laughter]

CV: "Okay with me." I don't have to worry about the snow and all of that in St. George.

RB: That was true.

CV: I didn't realize the snow was going to follow me down here.

RB: Sometimes! [Laughter]

CV: Yes. Anyway, I came down to St. George. I used to keep a bag of suckers at my desk. Whenever I would hear children out front, I would go out, "Okay, who is

making all this noise?" The [children] would look at [me], scared, little children. "Okay, who is making all this noise?"

RB: [Laughter]

CV: The little children look at you. "Are you making all this noise?" One little boy shook his head slowly, "Yes." [Laughter] I said, "Okay." I said to the mom, "You permit him a sucker?" "Yes." "Okay." I called them over here and put my bag of suckers out in front. I said, "I want you to reach in there and get as many of them as you can."

RB: [Laughter]

CV: All they could get was like two or three.

RB: Sure! But that is pretty good!

CV: Yes. I said, "You go over there and when you unwrap it, throw your paper in the trash can, over there." "Okay." I liked doing it [for] the little [children]. I love little children. They are great!

RB: Let's go ahead and close up here. I don't want you to miss your dinner. But what I have noticed in this interview and last week, you have the particularly vivid memory, you can describe the story in a lot of detail. Do you see your memories in your head?

CV: Yes.

RB: How has being blind changed your life?

CV: Well, it doesn't allow me to do the things that I really loved to do, that was drive my car, take pictures and participate in athletics, football, baseball, whatever.

RB: Yes. Right.

CV: I used to love to do that. I always was athletically inclined. I just enjoyed doing that. In any case, I couldn't drive anymore and I couldn't take pictures anymore. I just loved to do those things. Other than that, it really doesn't bother me that I am blind.

RB: When your dad said, "You need to fill your life, what is left of it, by making memories," have you been making memories since 1976?

CV: Yes, everything I do I put down in my memory banks. I have always been able, like you said, to describe things in detail. I guess it just comes from being a photographer.

RB: That is true too. I can see that.

CV: You look at things. Photographers see things that other people don't.

RB: Right.

CV: I guess it stems from that. I have always enjoyed doing that.

RB: The other thing I have noticed about you, the two times we have been talking, you have an incredibly positive outlook on life. Is that true?

CV: Yes. I decided after I really accepted my blindness, it took me about two and a half years to accept that blindness. After [that], I decided there were only two things to do: go forward or go backward. I did not want to go backwards. I decided that I would go forward. My [V.I.P.] coordinator, the visional impaired person up in Salt Lake [City, Salt Lake County, Utah], she used to say to me that I was an overachiever.

RB: Yes. [Laughter]

CV: I never really looked at myself in that manner, but I could understand why she [said that], because in 1994 they gave me Veteran of The Year by Governor [Michael] Leavitt.

RB: Is that right? That's amazing.

CV: I, what was I going to say? Oh, well, I just have never looked back, looked forward.

RB: Let me ask you this: being positive and looking forward, what is the secret? How do you do it?

CV: I don't worry about things I can't change.

RB: Very good! You can't change the past.

CV: There are some things that go on in your life that you just change, but you don't have the ability to do that, so just stop worrying about it and go on. That is exactly what I do, I don't worry about little stuff that I can't change. If I can change it, I change it. If I can't, I can't. You just don't do that. You don't worry about that. Just do the best you can. Just keep going. A lot of times, [fellows] will tell me, "Hey, how do you do this?" I say, "I just don't worry about it." And I don't. The secret is that you have to convince yourself that you can't do that so you don't worry about it.

RB: Just accept what you can do and you can't do and move on.

CV: Precisely.

RB: That is wonderful!

CV: A lot of times, a lot of [fellows] think I am funny, but they say, "Hey, "Chris," aren't you afraid of falling?" "Falling? No. Why?" "I would think you would be afraid of falling." "Falling doesn't hurt anybody, it's the sudden stop that gets me all the time."

RB: [Laughter] That's true! That's true! We will go ahead and end here. I just want to thank you for sharing your stories with me.

CV: Not a problem.

[END OF RECORDING EIGHT. END OF INTERVIEW.]