

## Ray R. Mertz

**Interviewer:** [We're at the Nevada State Veterans' Home in Boulder City, Nevada.] Today's date is May 11, 2006. We're interviewing Ray R. Mertz. My name is Shannon Berndt and our cameraman is Ed Feldman. To jog your memory a little bit, let's talk a little bit about before you were in the service. What were you doing?

**Ray Mertz:** Well, I was welding on B-26s at the Glenn L. Martin Armor Plant and I was in real good shape then. People would see me and say what's wrong with this guy; how come he isn't in the service, you know. So then my boss, he came down and told me I got you in for another deferment. I said tear that deferment up. I don't want it anymore. I said I want to get in submarines. So then I got into submarines. But I was just knocking around before that at different jobs, you know steel works and packing houses and all kinds of hard work but it wasn't bad.

**Interviewer:** And where were you living at this time?

**Ray Mertz:** Omaha, Nebraska.

**Interviewer:** Omaha, Nebraska. How old were you when you enlisted in the service?

**Ray Mertz:** Twenty-one.

**Interviewer:** Twenty-one.

**Ray Mertz:** They didn't want to take me. He said you're too old to get in. I said what do you mean I'm too old? He said well, you'd have been in by now if something wasn't wrong. He said let me see your classification so I showed him this 2B welding deal and he said you gotta wait until that runs out and then you can come down and see us. So I had to wait until my deferment ran out and then I went down to see him. Then he offered me first class CBs and I told him to stick it because I wanted to get in submarines.

**Interviewer:** What is a CB?

**Ray Mertz:** CBs was a real good outfit. They were hard workers. They put up quonset huts and everything for all the Navy and everybody. They were like engineers is what they were. A lot of times they'd put a sign up and the Marines would come in and take an island and they'd say sorry, the CBs have already been here.

**Interviewer:** So you joined the marines because you wanted to be on a sub.

**Ray Mertz:** Submarines, yeah. I'd say submarines, Navy, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Well, it says Marines on here.

**Ray Mertz:** No, submarines.

**Interviewer:** So that was the Navy then, right?

**Ray Mertz:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Ray Mertz:** I used to kick the hell out of those marines and they didn't like it. We called them brig rats. They were prison guards up at Portsmouth, New Hampshire. I got up there and this one time I'm trying to pick some gal up. My buddy, we got a 1940 Packard. I reach around to open the back door and said get in hon and this marine said shove off \_\_\_\_\_ (3:23). So I ignored him and I said come on hon, get in. She starts to get in and he says I said shove off or step out. I couldn't wait to get out. He's throwing his arms in the air like a big, I side stepped and busted him right smack in the nose. Blood spurted all over. He had about 20 or 30 more guys in the corner waiting to take a bus back. First thing I know I had a whole circle of them around me. They used to sharpen their belt buckles so they could wrap them around their fists to cut you with, you know. So the old cop come on over and he said I saw whole thing. He poked me in the ribs and said get your ass back in that car. I reached right over his shoulder and I busted this guy again and spun him clear around. I started a riot out there. I'm in the can in \_\_\_\_\_ (4:11) the next morning there, some chief was in there and he said boy, I almost saw a riot up on Conner Street last night. He says some sailor hit a marine in the nose and he bled for half an hour. I stuck my head out of the can and said where the hell were you? I said, I was looking for some help and there was just this other guy and myself you know. I said we were pretty well outnumbered. We went out to, well it wasn't all night, but it was a set up place. You brought in your own booze and they'd sell you the setups to drink with. There were fights going on there every night, every night.

**Interviewer:** And where was this at?

**Ray Mertz:** This was in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

**Interviewer:** \_\_\_\_\_ (5:01).

**Ray Mertz:** \_\_\_\_\_ (5:02) had was onion sized \_\_\_\_\_ (5:04) tear a hole through the wall and go around there. You wouldn't go around near the door or \_\_\_\_\_ (5:10). So we went out there to pick up some more sailors and they kicked the shit out of some marines. They were already on the bus and gone back.

**Interviewer:** Well that sounded really interesting.

**Ray Mertz:** Well I was light heavyweight champ on the base up there for the 14 months that I was up there. We fought a black team from \_\_\_\_\_ (5:37) Island and they had a white team

from there. I fought both their guys. We fought the CBs, we fought the Coast Guard, the Army, the Marines, we fought everybody.

**Interviewer:** So did you box? It was boxing?

**Ray Mertz:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Did you box before you were in the marines, I mean the Navy?

**Ray Mertz:** Oh yeah. So I don't \_\_\_\_\_ (5:59) through bone anyway. You know, too many guys, I was standing by out here Navy's locker for 35 years and this one mailman, he thought he was tough, he'd say let's go out and kick ass tonight. He didn't know the first thing about kicking ass. He didn't know how to throw \_\_\_\_\_ (6:39) a wristwatch. He didn't know the difference. Guys like that, man, they could get hurt you know because they don't know what the hell they're doing. It just seemed like I had a guardian angel watching over me all the time. I never got hurt.

**Interviewer:** So, did you see combat?

**Ray Mertz:** No, I was lucky. I had all North Atlantic because I was boxing, I was on the boxing team up there. They put me on a school sub so I'd instruct one class going out to sea and we'd feed them coming back in and we picked another class and feed them going out to sea. We'd show them how to ring for a depth charge, escape according to S-fire, all kinds of stuff you know. One day I'm in a forward room and I see this student back there on a fish. That's the torpedo. It's got a little propeller underneath and that has to go through the water so many times, it spins around, so then it's armed. It's loaded. And this asshole is sitting there spinning this thing. I don't know how long, I said how long have been doing that? He said, I don't know. Well, I told the skipper I'm going to go in and unload this fish. Because then just a 5-lb. bomb could blow up the whole sub, you know.

**Interviewer:** Oh, my goodness. So that was your job that you were trained for, was to be a torpedo man?

**Ray Mertz:** Yeah, a torpedo man, yeah. I didn't learn anything about it. They just kept giving me ratings because I was boxing up there. \_\_\_\_\_ (8:24) remembers the 21 tool. That was when you took the exercise head off and put a loaded head on the fish. I \_\_\_\_\_ (8:34). But I knew the sub \_\_\_\_\_ (8:36). They turned on first class a couple times. He'd say, what did you knock that guy out with? What did you hit him with, a left hook? Left or right \_\_\_\_\_ (8:47). When he first got me my, well, you have to be a seaman first, which comes automatically. Then we started them from third class. He says, he was up on the bridge and \_\_\_\_\_ (9:02) was our executive officer and our skipper was up there with him. He said Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ (9:08), he said, how about third class for Mertz? He said I don't think he's been in subs long enough to rate third class. But he said Sir, Mertz has been in long enough to rate third class as you have to make full lieutenant. Well Lester was a \_\_\_\_\_ (9:24) guy and he didn't care who he talked to. He had the

clap nine times being over there but he didn't care about skippers or nothing. He'd tell them just the way it was. When I'd go to take the test, he says, here's the book. He gave me the answers to all the questions and he said, just don't get 4.0 on it. Make sure you get 3.8 or something. So I missed several of them on there. I made second class the same way and he was going to give me first class. This guy would have made me an admiral, you know. In the mean time, this guy by the name of Harold \_\_\_\_\_ (10:09) was taking the group over to get these German U-boats. Surrendered over there. If you spoke German, you know, they'd take you. So I went up to talk to him. He said you speak better German than I do so he put me down as interpreter. So I went over. They flew us over in C-54s and we brought back two subs that time. We were supposed to bring back three but the third crew got shipped back on the Queen Mary and \_\_\_\_\_ (10:40) boat. I don't know why.

**Interviewer:** Where did you learn to speak German?

**Ray Mertz:** In high school.

**Interviewer:** Oh, in high school.

**Ray Mertz:** Yeah. I had a real good teacher. She was a real honey.

**Ray Mertz:** You know, when I was selling pharmaceuticals for Miles Laboratories later on -- I was a factory rep for them -- and I knew that she had retired to this one small town in Nebraska. I called on that town so I looked her up and oh, was she happy to see me. Then when I told her I was an interpreter for the unit, she just went gaga you know because, I told her you know, you didn't teach me everything. I said, I'd get down on these boats and say \_\_\_\_\_ (11:28), what's this valve called in German. That's called \_\_\_\_\_ (11:32). Well I'd know it's the flood valve then. She said I wouldn't know that either. She said I just had two semesters in college. I thought she had been speaking German all her life, it was so good. She was really great.

**Interviewer:** So when you were on the U-boats, were you the only interpreter?

**Ray Mertz:** No, no. We had F.M. Kessler and what the heck was this other guy's name, we had a couple more, two or three more guys, you know.

**Interviewer:** So were the U-boats captured and you were taken them?

**Ray Mertz:** They surrendered in Norway and then the \_\_\_\_\_ (12:12) stepped down for a while and then they brought them down to us on the \_\_\_\_\_ (12:17) River to \_\_\_\_\_ (12:19) and that's where we picked these boats up. They had like 50 or 60 boats all up there, all together you know, subs. They didn't have many left because they had, gosh what was it, 1,400 U-boats or something. They had them all, every one of them was sunk except these. The last U-boat I was on was a U-234. That was the largest sub that Hitler had ever made. It was a cargo sub and it was also a mine layer. They had enemy torpedo troops on these big mine shafts up in front in the forward room and I was in charge of that but they had 1,200 lbs. of uranium on board and

they had a jet plane all crated up. They had eleven German scientists with them. They were going to Tokyo. They wanted to give them the atomic bomb and nail our butts. So at any rate, why when we, they had this young skipper because all their old skippers were dead, the submarine skippers for these U-boats. He wired in and told us where he was located, for us to come out and pick him up because he didn't want to surrender to Canada or England or anybody else. So then, we had him follow us up to Portsmouth, New Hampshire. That's where the brig rats were in the Naval prison. We took them up there and then I took over the forward room on the boat from there. I got a picture of me at home, I'm coming out of this forward hatch, and it's signed the U-234. My granddaughter did it in German Italics. She wrote it in German print and all.

**Interviewer:** Would you be willing to have a copy made to go along with this?

**Ray Mertz:** They're supposed to bring, I'm not saying they're supposed to because they didn't even know about it but my birthday is, I'll be 84 Saturday so I'll see if they won't bring that picture out with them.

**Interviewer:** That would be great.

**Ray Mertz:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Do you have any pictures of when you were boxing?

**Ray Mertz:** I had a whole boxing album and my brother got killed over in \_\_\_\_\_ (14:55) while he was playing for \_\_\_\_\_ (14:57) and so they kept him over there for a couple years and when they were ready to send the bodies back so he's been buried in Fort McPherson Cemetery just outside of North Platt, Nebraska. I went home for the funeral and I had it in my locker in the forward room and of course, I didn't ever lock it up but when I came back it was all gone. I had nice pictures of subs blowing up ships and everything. It was great. It was a nice album there. That's the trouble with pictures. You can't replace them or anything.

**Interviewer:** No.

**Ray Mertz:** Then I trained fighters for over 40 years. This Ferd Hernandez, he was runner up in the Chicago golden glove finals in '59. In 1960, he was on the same team with Cassius Clay those two years. He ended up, he and his brother Art, winning Omaha five times and made a trip to Chicago. Then Ferd was number two middleweight in the world when he turned pro and Art was number three middleweight in the world. His kid brother Dale was rated number seven in the junior honorary class. They were all good fighters, tough guys you know. I mean, they knew how to fight.

**Interviewer:** And you trained them?

**Ray Mertz:** I trained them. Their dad trained them mostly but then I was in the corner all the time. They didn't want their dad in the corner. They wanted me in their corner. So when Ferd got to be number two middleweight in the world he told Art one time, he said Art you know actually, you were a better fighter than I was. Art says yeah, but you had Ray Mertz, because I talked Ferd into coming out here and Art stayed in Omaha. After Ferd died, he died when he was 57, I was talking to Art one day and I said Art, did you say that, that you had Ray Mertz for a trainer? He said I remember it just like it was yesterday. He sent me a nice picture, a boxing picture of himself, saying that I was the best corner man he had ever had work his corner. Even though I wasn't even with him when he was a pro. I only worked in his corner \_\_\_\_\_ (17:32) out here one time in a fight but that's the only time I ever worked Art's corner as a pro. \_\_\_\_\_ (17:40) You had to really be knowledgeable when you're in the corner and your working a guy's fight. You can't \_\_\_\_\_ (17:51) you would take a handful of ice and throw it in the fighter's face like it's in a movie show like \_\_\_\_\_ (18:01). The guys got enough problems out there with the other guy across the ring from him fighting him. He just got a good blow and you tell him listen, here's what the guy is doing wrong and I said maybe you'll jab twice and throw right handed, push him to one side and nail him. You know. Don't tell him more than three things. Just two, three things. That's all. I've seen two or three guys all yelling at them at once and these are pros, professional. They don't know a left hook from a wrist watch. They don't know nothing.

**Interviewer:** So when you were in the Navy, was that what you did on your off time? Did they set up a big boxing match and people would...?

**Ray Mertz:** We used to have smokers they called them, those times. This one night, fighting \_\_\_\_\_ (18:54) and Fred \_\_\_\_\_ (18:56). He's still alive. He's down in Texas. I'm taping my hands and I'm going to fight him in about half an hour. So he comes over and he says, how long you taping your hands for \_\_\_\_\_ (19:08)? I said, I don't care, go ahead. He said, what do you say we make this go to decision? In other words, throw it. He didn't want to get knocked out. And we had 12 oz. gloves on, \_\_\_\_\_ (19:32) big ones. They had horsehair in them instead of rubber so if you wanted to break the padding down, you'd push it like this and then just your knuckles would be up against the leather, you know. So the bell sounds and you'd come across the ring and you'd Humph! He throws a right at me and hit me, knocked me into the fifth row. \_\_\_\_\_ (19:43) and I thought you naughty bastard. So then I throw a jab and I could \_\_\_\_\_ (19:49) off a jab. I'd throw a jab and bang! Throw the hook, bang, bang! Every time I'd throw the jab he'd move his head that way. You don't miss a jab. It's good to bob and weave but you don't move your head that way every time because the guy catches on. But if you stop to jab and you jab me, I'm going to knock it down with my hand or I'm going to \_\_\_\_\_ (20:09) my glove and bust you in the back of the head but he's moving his head to that side. I snap it out and he moves his head and threw a left hook and I had the only knockout of the year. I had my corner man, this marine and in the second round I said bust my gloves out for me, you know. He tipped a bucket of water over my shoe there. Afterwards we go up to the mess hall for steaks and he sits way down the mess hall away from us other guys. He's glaring at me and I just, like you dirty bastard. If he had said anything then I would have say well, did I take it easy enough for you, because he wanted to clock me real good, you know. And knowledge is power, I'll tell you because you gotta have it up here.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. That's for sure. Let's see...How did you celebrate the holidays? Did you do anything special for like Thanksgiving or Christmas when you were...?

**Ray Mertz:** When I was in the service?

**Interviewer:** Yes, when you were in the service.

**Ray Mertz:** Oh, I can't remember.

**Interviewer:** Did you receive letters and packages and that from home? Keep in contact with the people from home?

**Ray Mertz:** Oh, I'm sure, but I can't remember. I know I used to write home about once every three months, just so that my mother would know I was still alive.

**Interviewer:** Well, that's good. Tell me about your most memorable experience.

**Ray Mertz:** In the service?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Ray Mertz:** What happened was we were taking this fish off that this kid was moving with this propeller you know and we pulled him alongside the pier and everybody had the duty and everybody is running everywhere to get the hell off the boat, you know. So at any rate, why I had an Officer Woodbury and we used to call him Fellow \_\_\_\_\_ (22:36) and \_\_\_\_\_ (22:40) came on board at 0400 or so put Woodbury down but \_\_\_\_\_ (22:46) and he was top side helping me and \_\_\_\_\_ (22:51) mustang down below decks. We were out on a capstan up forward there because we were in the capstans \_\_\_\_\_ (23:04). Why this, it's like a chute coming up out of there and it's all greased. It's a slick deal for the torpedo to be pulled up. It was up over and these pulleys come around and so Woodbury, he had a hold of a line and I did too and I didn't have any more right arm \_\_\_\_\_ (23:25) with me. That's what the guys that usually did the fish you know. That's what the machinists made. You have a guideline on the torpedo. It's just about like this and sticks up about like your finger goes through the \_\_\_\_\_ (23:42). Your fish is going in straight you know. And that was the balancing point on your torpedo. As the crane came on over and I told this machinist mate, I said put that line around that guideline on the fish. He didn't know what the hell I meant. He was dumb and I was starting to get up like this to tell him and as I'm getting up, his line slips off of this capstan and I saw this guide \_\_\_\_\_ (24:14) along the deck and Woodbury is going up for this other thing and it split his pants up the back and started going down the shoot like this and had it been armed, we could have blown up the whole damn pier around there.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Ray Mertz:** Which I don't know if it was or not. But this \_\_\_\_\_ (24:33) down the hole, he saw what was happening like this and he threw a running bull around that thing just about like that before it could go any further and he stopped it from slamming down any further. It was on my sister's birthday, October 13, and when she called me up that night I was still shaking. And another time I had to trim \_\_\_\_\_ (25:00) water leaking from it, underneath this step that goes into the forward battery compartment and my foot slid under there and I had this steel step hit my shin and just put a slit on there about the size of my thumb. It hurt like hell, you know and I remember this ensign, this lieutenant didn't want to give me \_\_\_\_\_ (25:37). He started laughing because he saw that I hurt myself and I thought you bastard, if you weren't an officer I'd punch you right in the nose. But if I did they'd kick me out of the subs and maybe give me a bad conduct discharge or something. I just gave him a dirty look and I went up in the forward room. We were giving the fish an azimuth run. It's where you hang them from a chain \_\_\_\_\_ (26:06) and then you get like the \_\_\_\_\_ (26:13) on them to check them over and see if all your screws are going. You got twin screws back there, going around, but you have to see if your vertical and horizontal rudders are working like this for the azimuth of the earth. So like if you're in South America or down around the equator, that's important on how your fish are going to run. So that's what we were doing. I happened to look at my leg. I pulled up my dungarees and I had a knot on my shin like this. So I go topside and I see a guy up there. He had a torpedo truck. It was a flat truck that you carry torpedoes onto sites. I said hey, how about giving me a ride up to sick bay. He said, I can't give you no ride up to sick bay. He looked down at my leg and he said, jump on. He took me up there and it took a couple of months because I had a cellulitis infection. Like one cell breaks into two, two into four, four into eight, and just boom, just swell up real quick. I ended up putting pressure bandages on it and they just had sulfa at the time. They put that tincture violet or something on there and tightened them up real good. It finally went away but it seemed like a long time.

**Interviewer:** Wow. Did that affect your being able to box?

**Ray Mertz:** No, huh uh. It didn't bother me. I always stayed in real good shape. I used to do 120 pushups a day. I'd do 60 in the morning and 60 at night. If I ever got drunk at night, before I'd hit the sack I'd do 60 pushups. That was just like saying my prayers or anything else.

**Interviewer:** Even though you were drunk, you could still do that many?

**Ray Mertz:** Oh yeah. Then my stomach muscles, just like today I still got good stomach muscles from doing so many sit ups, and sideways, so if you got hit in the kidneys or something, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Wow. Do you recall where you were on December 7, 1941, the Pearl Harbor attack?

**Ray Mertz:** I was welding at the Almira Bomber Plant in Omaha just outside of \_\_\_\_\_ (28:42) Airforce Base now. I was welding out there and it was in the morning. I'd been out drunk all night and I was in South Omaha, I remember, just going from one bar to another \_\_\_\_\_ (29:03).



**Interviewer:** What did you think when you heard.

**Ray Mertz:** I never was, I remember I just, you didn't give it much thought, you thought well, I don't know what's going to happen but when it happens it happens. I know that I was working for a while at two of the Union Pacific railroad yards and they did all kinds of shipping out lumber and everything. I mean they were getting ready for war. You could tell the way they were operating. \_\_\_\_\_ (29:39 through 29:47) My brother Dan -- I had three brothers, all officers in the air force -- he walked around, he and his friend got killed over in \_\_\_\_\_ (29:56) Italy but I didn't get killed and neither did the other two brothers.

**Interviewer:** Well that's good. What skills or lessons did you learn?

**Ray Mertz:** They tell you that you learn a lot of skills. Like they say, well you can be a welder. I was a welder before I went in and what welding you do there, you do little, you know like solder or something. That's about all you'd do. The skipper, there was this one skipper who called me in \_\_\_\_\_ (30:35) he said, Mertz, I see by your orders here that you're an Army/Navy certified welder. I said yeah. He said well, wouldn't you rather go up to the base out there and weld on a fish or something? I said no! I said I wanted to get into subs so bad I turned down first class with the CBs to get into subs. I said hell no I don't. Oh, just forget it, that's right I just wanted to know if you wouldn't be happier up there, you know. He was a nice guy but...I remember the cook, he was Asiatic, he used to spit on the griddle in the morning to see if it was hot. Spit would bounce all over and I'd say \_\_\_\_\_ (31:25) you dirty bastard, what's the matter with you? He'd say that don't hurt nothing. He says that kills all the germs. I'd say we don't want to see fired spit. I don't care it's killing the germs or not. Thanks for fried spit.

**Interviewer:** Let's see...Do you recall the day that you left the service?

**Ray Mertz:** Let's see. Yeah, yeah. I went to St. Louis, Missouri. I got drunk again down there. See, now, I haven't had a drink in 32 years and I haven't had a cigarette in 30 years but that was a big part of my life, was drinking at that time. I remember this guy's name that I picked up that I didn't even know. He was in the Navy. We had gone out together and his name was Eugene Smugali. He was a Pollock kid and he lived in St. Louis so we went around making all the bars and I remember they told us because you had that ruptured eagle honor, the pin, all these girls know to the penny how much money you got when you're discharged and all this stuff. Stay away from the gals that give you big \_\_\_\_\_ (32:41) on it you know. Of course we didn't pay any attention to that and we did find the first two gals that would start drinking with you. Yeah. It was pretty good.

**Interviewer:** It sounded like you had an interesting career.

**Ray Mertz:** Oh, yeah. I had a good time.

**Interviewer:** Where were you when the war ended?

**Ray Mertz:** Well, when the war with Japan ended, I was on this German U-boat and I was up on the counting tower so I'm look out. It came over the radio that Japan had surrendered and I just felt all light, just like I was so elated that this whole thing was over with and I felt like just, like jumping overboard but of course I didn't. I felt like geez, this is great. And they offered me again first class and a new boat. The skipper was a dumb bastard. His name was Lieutenant Commander Perez and he talked like this. I think from Puerto Rico they sent, from the richest family down there, they sent one of their kids through \_\_\_\_\_ (34:09) and he had to be one of them. He'd say starboard ahead 2/3 back, part back 1/3, I think. He said "I think." Geez. Then the executive officer, he was a mustang and worked his way up through the ranks and he didn't know \_\_\_\_\_ (34:29). This Tom Harwood was a graduate of Carnegie Tech and a good friend of mine. We were up \_\_\_\_\_ (34:38) one night and one of the guys -- Buck Rogers was \_\_\_\_\_ (34:43) -- and he said hey Buck, where's the North Star and he says that's it, right over there and Tom Harwood spoke up and said, no it isn't. There's the North Star right there. And then somebody said, when's Mardi Gras and Buck says that's in October and Tom says, no it isn't. He said it's in February or something you know. He corrected this guy and I said, how do you know about astrology? Well he says, any college you go to you have to have so much astrology, you know. We were steering on our screws, so I'd say starboard end 2/3 quarter back 1/3, I think because we had twin rudders and our rudders crapped out on us and now we're steering on our screws like this and we were in the North Atlantic in a storm that, well, the waves are up 60-70 feet.

**Interviewer:** Oh man.

**Ray Mertz:** With each wave I'd think, well this is the end of it now. We'd get clear up to the top of that wave and we'd go down like this and now our screws are out of the water and it would just shake the hell out of it. Then they'd get in the water and they'd settle down. When the USS Ramp C1 Tug come out for us they wanted all right arm rates topside and I'm a right arm rate but I know what they're going to do, they're going to shoot a line over to our sub from there with a cable on the other end so that they could tow us on the way to our \_\_\_\_\_ (36:31). I thought I ain't getting topside. So a guy by the name of \_\_\_\_\_ (36:37) from Chicago, he got up there. The only thing they had to hold him on was one of these \_\_\_\_\_ (36:46) lines and that's a clothes line for hanging clothes and I'd been with them before when they'd be training officers and if the water was just smooth as glass the skipper would put his hand like this and I'd have a wooden crate and I'd throw it over and say "man over board, starboard side." So then this officer could either opt to back down on it, which the guy might get caught up in the screws, or he could make a circle and pick him up. It would take him about half an hour in calm water. Over there, they'd never pick you up.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Ray Mertz:** You're gone. You're dead. That's why I laid in my bunk like I was sleeping. I couldn't get up there and kicked overboard. And then the skipper, they were radioing back and forth and he said something about well, the skipper told him, he says tell them we'll follow

behind you and Buck Rogers \_\_\_\_\_ (38:00), Sir, says it would sound better if you would say we'll follow after you. You sound like you're in the Navy if you're talking and you say we'll follow behind you. The first time we went out on this U-234, we sat there in the \_\_\_\_\_ (38:19). He takes us down and luckily we were just in 259 feet of water and he sticks us stern first in the mud. So I just had my compartment all cleaned up and all you see is this \_\_\_\_\_ (38:38) in there and I had it all cleaned up. So we had all the crew. First we pumped all the after tanks up to the forward, trim tanks and everything, all buoyancy and that didn't do any good. So he had all the crew coming forward and that didn't do any good. So then they called in the pig boat. That's because there's lead pigs in the bilges that weigh from 50-75 lbs. a piece. \_\_\_\_\_ (39:07) from the after part of the sub to the forward part. We'd \_\_\_\_\_ (39:16) hands on the other one against the bulk head and my bulkhead is all sturdy and finally it broke loose and we'd get surface and get the hell up there. On that sub we didn't have any \_\_\_\_\_ (39:32) or any escape apparatus or we could have made our way up like we did on our own boats at that time. But they were so far ahead of us, the Germans with all their U-boats. They were about twenty years ahead of us. They could fire their fish one every three seconds; ours was one every five. We could see up 87 degrees with their periscope; they could see up 90 degrees. They could see straight up. If you're on your axillary lighting, battle lanterns, and everything else gave out in your German U-boat, they had big strips painted in the overhead, the bulkheads, all your gauges, in phosphorous paint on them. Your bulkhead doors and that had phosphorous paint on them and they would light up and they were spooky and eerie enough that you could see to get around. It would take three of us guys on the push-in bar to push our fish into the tube off of this chain fall and our chain falls were noisy and sonar could pick those up because they're rattling. Their chain falls, every other link was like wrapped in a rubber ball. You could spin that chain fall and it would just kind of hum. It wouldn't make any noise. On their attack scope as it went through the water, they told us don't look for the scope, look for that feather of water that goes behind it, you know, because an enemy sub is one of your biggest enemies. On their attack scope they had a cable spiral down around so when it went through the water it would make a whirlpool. It wouldn't even make a feather behind it, you know.

**Interviewer:** Oh.

**Ray Mertz:** And they were smart. They were really smart. But they were too frugal. They would use hand pumps in the galley sink and they had like 15 or 20-watt bulbs. Their sockets for their bulbs were different than ours so our maintenance guys had to tear out all their sockets and we put in our own sockets where we could have 60 or 75 watt bulbs. But they were saving on batteries on their electricity and stuff. Same with their air. Our guys switched our air over to the water tanks and that so when you turned on the spigot water would come out, instead of having to stand and hand pump it. They told us it takes, \_\_\_\_\_ (42:20) told us it would take us about nine days to two weeks to de-store the submarine, you know. We did it in three days. We had a daisy chain and we just kept \_\_\_\_\_ (42:30). Their bilges were full of food. The torpedo tubes were full of food, cheeses, everything, because they wanted to see how long they could stay out there without giving up you know. I remember they had this Boston brown bread and it was in a can so it was fresh all the time. You just opened the can and it was good. Now our bread would get moldy and we'd just cut the mold off of it and eat it anyway. But they

had baker's cocoa on board their subs and they had real fine cheeses and then they had \_\_\_\_\_ (43:11). It was a cognac and it was all wrapped in straw and a lot of that crew drank it and I know some of our guys really got goofy on that stuff. It was really interesting you know. It was good.

**Interviewer:** Did you make lots of friends?

**Ray Mertz:** Oh, I had all kinds of friends. Same way out here. Everyplace I go I make friends.

**Interviewer:** I could see why. Do you keep in contact with any of your old friends?

**Ray Mertz:** Right now I can't call long distance. I used to call long distance all the time whenever I wanted to but out here when I was still working, because I worked until I was 80 years old, but now I can't write because my fingers have neuropathy in them. I've already had this hand operated on. They feel numb all the time. You can't write. You go to pick up something and you drop it so I forget I'm writing, you know. My daughter is real good at that. Anyway, I let her do it.

**Interviewer:** Did your wartime experience contribute to your career after you got out of the service?

**Ray Mertz:** No.

**Interviewer:** What did you do after you got out of the service?

**Ray Mertz:** Well, looking around I figured well, about the only way you're going to get to the top, because you're not a doctor and you're not an attorney, is to be a good salesman and I wanted a shot at selling. So my first job was a coffee bandit for Jewel Tea Company. I went house to house. That's a good experience. Then I took a job with Roberts Dairy on a milk route with them for five years. Then I sold vacuum cleaners for Sears and Roebucks and then I couldn't stand my wife anymore. She was impossible. So I answered an ad for Miles Laboratories and they hired me. Before I went into the room, well, first off Orville, the division manager came out and said I'm sorry to keep you waiting but he said we have another applicant and he has sold drugs in the competitive line so we're getting kind of carried away in here, so we'll get to you in a minute. Man, I'd never sold any drugs, and I said Lord, I never asked you for much ever, you know but I said just help me say the right thing at the right time. So I went in and the interview is almost over with. I got talking about cars and the vice president said well, I have a Mercury and I have a Mercedes Benz. He said I like the Mercury every bit as good as I like the Mercedes Benz. I told him I knew this gentleman who was going to get a new car and I said well, why don't you buy a new Cadillac. He says Ray, \$4,000, that's too much to pay for any car and that's how much they were then. The next time I see him he's got a Chrysler Imperial. I said what did that cost? He says \$5,000. I said you were the one telling me \$4,000 was too much to pay. He said well, the car weighs 5,000 lbs., coffee is a dollar a pound so it's the same as buying coffee. I told that story and that tickled the Vice President's

funnybone. When I left he said cancel all the other deals. They had about 30 more applicants in Lincoln, Nebraska. He said cancel all of them. You've got your man right here. So then he wanted to see how my wife was going to react to this so I told her I said listen, dummy, you wanted me to better myself and this is my chance to do it. Whatever they say, say this is what Ray has always wanted to do and if it makes him happy, I'm happy. But you could never make her happy. So the next day they called me up and they said you're hired. So I said well, I'll give Sears my two-weeks' notice. I went down and gave them two weeks' notice and they said you don't have to give us any notice, just up and quit, that's okay. So I quit and said my name is Schmidt, I don't give a shit, I quit and I went to work for Miles. That was good. I had two county lines across Kansas and a little more than half of Nebraska, from one end of the state to the other. It was good.

**Interviewer:** Then you did that until you retired?

**Ray Mertz:** No, I quit there because I was getting a divorce finally. I told her, see in those days I got her pregnant, so in those days you married the gal. It was a noble thing to do. You didn't run off. Today you'd give them child support and get the hell away from her. I took this job to get away from her in the first place, to go on the road, and she'd start a fight with me. Every Wednesday night I'd call up and she'd start a fight. Then I didn't give a damn if I went home or not when I got in on Thursday or Friday. So one night I called up and she said what were you doing in Omaha last night? I said I wasn't in Omaha last night. Where were you? Don't lie to me because the police have already contacted me and they know. I said I don't give a damn what policeman contacted you or anything, I wasn't in Omaha. Yeah, you were probably drunk and you probably thought it was better to hit and run than be caught drinking because '54 light blue Chevy -- that's what I had at the time -- and it had my license number on it and everything. So I'm talking to a couple guys at the hotel in Beatrice, Nebraska before I was going in the next day and this one guy said well, we'd better go out and check your car out with you now. Do you have any scratches or dents or anything and I said no. Well, we can verify it then that you were okay here. Because he said if you get in an accident between here and Omaha, you are \_\_\_\_\_ (50:32) which accident happened in. So at any rate, he said no, you don't have any. So he called up the Northside Police Station and they didn't have any record of any cops but they have a Southside Police Station and I lived in South Omaha and that's where the Southside was. And so sure enough here this guy comes over, pulls up in the driveway in a police car and he's got the flash beam light on and gets out his flashlight and he's looking all around. We lived in a nosy bull hunk neighborhood anyway and you could see all of them wondering...so I went out and I said Rob, what's going on. He said I don't know what happened. Just forget it, forget it. I said no, I won't forget it. I said you come on in and tell my old lady it's all right and forget it. He says well, they were just changing license plates at the time and this guy came down and the new plate he got was the same plate as mine but I hadn't changed mine yet. He said that the South Station and the North Station don't stay that close together so if things do happen at either station they won't find out about it for a week. But she used to always accuse me of something. Every time I'd have to have her...I mean I'm in Grand Island, Nebraska. I'm in a bus station and here some high school kids got off a school bus and they were giggling and laughing and she said you're at a party and they're all laughing at me,

paranoid you see. And I said no, I'm not at a party. I'm in a bus depot in Grand Island and oh, no you're not. It was all the time. So then finally after I was married for 17 years I came out here and I ran into a nurse out here that worked at Sunrise for 25 years and what a sweetheart, beautiful and nice, never an argument, not anything over \_\_\_\_\_ (52:54). The other one got my expense check, my bonus check, and my regular check and she had to have all of those. I'd go to go on the road and she'd try to keep me there. One time she offered me \$20.00 to go on the road and I said how the hell am I supposed to go on the road with \$20.00? You know motels then were \$4.00 or something. She said well, you can get by on that. I said yeah, you'd probably shack up with some other salesman or something and stay in a room with him. What a nightmare. So coming out here was, see, but if I hadn't been with her for 17 miserable years, I wouldn't have come out here and run into Cathy and had 34, double the time, beautiful years with her, just really nice.

**Interviewer:** And that's how you ended up here in the Vegas Valley.

**Ray Mertz:** Yeah, yeah. She died in the year 2000 on Thanksgiving Day. She had emphysema. She used to smoke and then she quite smoking about 10-12 years before but it had already done its damage. This guy that's in my room he, Jesus if he don't drive me crazy. All of them. They're all such heavy smokers.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Ray Mertz:** And you couldn't tell them anything. You couldn't tell me either. There were a lot of times I tried to quit. Smoking and drinking go together but I gave up the drinking first for two years and then smoking was easy, you know. I know the Lord gave me the strength to do this because I couldn't do it on my own before. It was just as if I had never had a drink in my life, which I thought I could never do without. Same way with cigarettes. It's like I'd never had a cigarette.

**Interviewer:** That's great. Are you a member of any Veterans organization or anything?

**Ray Mertz:** I used to be with VFW but that was a long time ago now. American Legion in Omaha a long time ago. That was the largest post in the whole country.

**Interviewer:** Wow.

**Ray Mertz:** Yeah. American Post 5 (singing) best in the land, dearest and best, you know the rest, we always give a helping hand, Omaha Post American Legion...I can't remember but it seems like it was post 38 but it was the biggest one yeah. You couldn't see that possible with Chicago and New York, now when they'd have so many more of them they wouldn't be as large as Omaha. They used to have boxing up there too and that's one of the reasons...

**Interviewer:** How come you didn't go professional boxing after you got out of the Navy?

**Ray Mertz:** Because my old man used to be a professional fighter and once I'd get through teaching these kids how to fight and everything, and same way with Ferd Hernandez and his brother Art, old Pete comes up to fight with the old man and says Mr. Mertz, I want you to turn my boys professional. I said Pete, your kids have won all the laurels; any parent would be damn proud of it. They've won everything you can in amateur boxing. But I want them to turn pro. I says Pete, these professionals carry their scars to the grave with them and we got \_\_\_\_\_ (56:30) and he can't find his own place to sit down to eat these days. He's goofy. He said he fought Ezra Charles. He never fought Ezra. And I got the ring book on it and I looked up Ezra Charles. He never fought David Hamps at all. No record of Hamps even in the book. It had like, Ezra Charles had some four-round exhibitions. He said he had fought a 15-rounder with him and "I came down once, he knocked me down twice..." He might have been his sparring partner or somebody else's but he must have taken some awful beatings in there. Because I don't know, he's got the moves you know. He's been around the stuff and there's a lot of times guys will talk this fight talk and they don't know nothing. Great big guy would come in the bar and he used to say he knocked this Swede, \_\_\_\_\_ (57:29) Johansson; he said I knocked him cold. He said \_\_\_\_\_ (57:33) came over and gave me another \$5,000 and \_\_\_\_\_ (57:37) never ever fought this guy or nothing. One night he says I kept giving him the jab, the jab, the jab. I thought well, who are you going to hurt with that, you know. \_\_\_\_\_ (57:48) bust out laughing. I fought this one \_\_\_\_\_ (57:52) up at \_\_\_\_\_ (57:55). He was all muscles. He was a weightlifter. I started laughing when I saw him because I knew he couldn't fight. I go on out and it's just like he's driving a wheelbarrow and I go bang, right in the nose. He got the dumbest look on his face and I couldn't wait. I just started laughing and came back to the corner and \_\_\_\_\_ (58:15) was the ring man and he says \_\_\_\_\_ (58:20) I was laughing so damn hard I can hardly fight, you know. Somebody told him because he's all muscled up he should be a fighter, you know. He can't fight a lick. Like him he's built real thin and frail like. When I was a kid in high school I went, when I was in grade school and they took us up to South High and tried to sell us on their different sports and stuff. This kid that was kind of a skinny kid, he's putting some gloves on with a guy by the name of Schmidt. Schmidt was a husky guy and the skinny kids just bing, boom, just knocked his head off. His nose was bleeding and everything. I used to see this guy years later on in Omaha and every time I think, he had real sloped shoulders and real kind of thin like. He didn't look like anybody would pick on him you know but a lot of guys get fooled. They don't know, because again, knowledge is power.

**Interviewer:** It is.

**Ray Mertz:** And with Ferd and his brother I said look, these judges don't know nothing. They don't know anything. They hadn't had a glove on or anything. They don't know. They believe what they read in the paper so when we were in Chicago they had like three rings going and I'm working the corner, I'd yell come on Fidel because if I'd Ferd out, they would take the fight away from him because you're not supposed to coach from the corner. So I'd yell Fidel and when I'd give him the Fidel shot, because everybody in there is so loud and noisy in there and Fidel carries. So then it would be like 20-30 seconds left in the round and Ferd would really pour it on, bam, bam, bam. Chicago Tribune has Ferdinand finishes stronger than all of his opponents, you know. That's using your head because Kid Gavelin used to do that when he was

fighting years ago. The kid that through the bull punch, remember him? Well he used to watch the clock in Madison Square Garden and we used to kid about it because he wouldn't lose nothing for two and a half minutes and then in that last minute he'd watch the clock and then he'd really pour it on and the guy who punches the other guy last, why that's impressive and sticks in the judges mind and they'd give you the round and so you got 'em. You don't beat the fighter, you beat the judges. That's who you have to beat. Knowledge is power. That's what it is.

**Interviewer:** Yep. Well thank you so much for sharing all these stories with us.

**Ray Mertz:** She won't remember nothing anyway.

**Interviewer:** That's all I have for you unless you have something else you'd like to share with us.

**Ray Mertz:** Okay. I've got some dirty stories. I went to the Boulder Club the other day. This friend of mine down there used to tend bar at the Thunderbird \_\_\_\_\_ (61:25) his locker. He was serving down there and he said I had my thumb in this one guy's soup and the guy said hey, you know you got your thumb in my soup? He said I know. He said I sprained it the other day and the doctor told me to keep it in something warm. The guy said so stick it up your ass and my friend said well, I do that when I'm in the kitchen. Put your hand in there. Now, do it. Do it.

**Interviewer:** Do what?

**Ray Mertz:** I got her in the sack and she don't know what to do. Well you gotta have fun. You're only here once.

**Interviewer:** That's right.

**Ray Mertz:** I'm glad I got all my \_\_\_\_\_ (62:36) but sometimes I'd bounce back and I get hit so hard, I'd go back in to take a shower and I know who I was and where I was but everything just seemed like I was in a movie or a dream or something, you know, because you get hit on the chin so hard that your brain hits the back of your skull and all you see is the yellow flash. There is no yellow flash in front of you. The guy is still there but you get too many of these and finally you end up like Steve Hamps down here or some of the other guys. Now Ferd Hernandez, if you see him, he's blind in one eye from fighting Nino Benvenuti for the championship over in Italy. It's too hard on the head and shoulders. You don't turn pro. You learn how to fight; it's good insurance you know, if you're walk into a bar or something. It never bothered me who I got into a fight with. I didn't care who it was. If someone is going to bust me anyway, I wasn't going to argue with the guy. You just don't, you \_\_\_\_\_ (63:51) kid brother, he hated cops and he'd bust a copy just for nothing. They finally put him, he's from Wyoming and I don't know if they have a prison there or not but he went to prison for two to three years for smacking cops. I remember one time he was out with Art and they were drinking and the police pulled them over. Art got out on his side and the cop put the cuffs on Art. Dale was still sitting in his seat



and the cop says get out you little Mexican son of a bitch. Dale gets outside and he says I ain't no son of a bitch and boom, he busts this cop right there. And then Art says this one cop was beating me over the legs so bad with that baton he had, he said I couldn't walk for about three days but he says he was just doing his job. But he says he didn't have to hit me so hard. But Art, as well as he could fight, just riding down the street \_\_\_\_\_ (65:06) although they could tear some guy's head off but somebody's got to put a cap in you so you don't go over your \_\_\_\_\_ (65:15) because they're all goofy today.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Ray Mertz:** Well listen, any time you run out of bull shit, why come back and I'll talk some more.

**Interviewer:** Okay. (Laugh)