Interviewer: Hello, this is Olivia Fernandez, doing the interview of Mr. Nathan Almond at the Torrance Library. It is July 9, 2012. OK, Mr. Almond, we'll begin by you telling me a little bit about where you born.

Mr. Almond: I was born in Chicago, Illinois.

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about living in Chicago.

Mr. Almond: Living in Chicago is rough. Carl Sandburg said it's the "hog butcher of the world," it was a tough, dirty place, and I had some small experiences which would prove that was the truth.

Interviewer: How long did you live there?

Mr. Almond: 21 years, until I went into the Navy. I always wondered whether the rest of the world was like Chicago. I said, why move someplace else? It would probably be identical to Chicago. Yet the first place they shipped me to in the Navy was Tacoma Park, Maryland. The most beautiful town! I had never seen anything quite like it. So I knew the rest of the world wasn't like Chicago.

Interviewer: And what made you enlist?

Mr. Almond: The draft made me enlist. To be frankly honest!

Interviewer: What did you think was going to happen? What did you look forward to, or you were avoiding, once you got that draft letter?

Mr. Almond: I don't know that I ever got the draft letter, but I knew it was coming. And I knew nothing about the Army other than they killed people for a living and I knew nothing about the Navy, and to this day I'm still trying to find out about the Navy!

Interviewer: Why did you choose the Navy?

Mr. Almond: Because they didn't have bayonets to stick into other people's stomachs. The idea of living the Army life in the field with a bayonet to kill somebody just didn't appeal to me at all. I was a student at the time, as well as working in my father's grocery store.

Interviewer: Where were you a student?

Mr. Almond: Well, I had gotten as far as junior college, Chicago City College/Wright Junior. I was studying chemistry because my brother had become a chemist. I found that I didn't care very much for chemistry. I was working very hard to get good grades. I wasn't getting them. When the war came along, it gave me a grand opportunity to get into another field, which was much more appealing to me. They had a program in the Navy for specialists. First of all you had to take a test, what they called the Eddy Test. I recall going

out to the State Lake Building in Chicago and was given a test there. I had to convince the officer there that I knew something about radio. I had been studying the subject as well as my school work. I did convince him to a degree and I took a test. Apparently I passed that. So I went into the Navy as a rated person.

Interviewer: What does that mean? I don't quite understand.

Mr. Almond: In the Army you'd get sergeant's stripes. In the Navy you'd get a rating. What was excellent about that is the Navy really needed specialists, people who had an understanding of special subjects. Like I said, I passed the Eddy test and did whatever else was necessary to convince the man, and I went into boot camp at Great Lakes, just north of Chicago, and started my Navy career.

Interviewer: What was it about the radio that interested you? Did you have one at home that you had worked with?

M**r. Almond:** Yes. I deliberately went out and got a kit from Allied Radio and built a kit, and took courses. I took a high school "how to build a radio set," and I took other courses wherever I could find them, to show that I had some skill. It worked out fine. The Navy was fantastic -- again, I knew nothing about the Navy. In fact, one of the things that intrigued me was that we said we were fighting Japan and it was after Pearl Harbor. Japan was in that direction, but all the reports of the war were down in the South Pacific. Don't they know where Japan is? My confusion about the Navy continued forevermore!

Interviewer: What about the training? Did you find anything in boot camp that interested you?

Mr. Almond: Not in boot camp. Boot camp was an attempt by the Navy to teach people discipline and I didn't need discipline. I had discipline all my life, working with my family in the grocery business. You worked day and night and you're always under constant discipline. If it meant sweeping the floors, you knew it was required to sweep the floors in the store. Later on in the Navy I had a big occasion to show that I could still sweep! I think I was being put to a test there and I passed that.

Interviewer: So you feel that your family background helped you.

Mr. Almond: Very much.

Interviewer: Did anything in school help you in particular, other than the interest in radio?

Mr. Almond: Oh, yeah. The whole school background is back there to help you in every possible way.

Interviewer: What was the contrast between the place you went to boot camp -- you said it was in Maryland?

Mr. Almond: No, it was in Great Lakes, near Chicago, just north of Chicago, maybe 50 miles.

Interviewer: Tell me about your assignment.

Mr. Almond: Well, let me just say something about my little experiences with boot camp when I was just getting into the Navy. I got in there and the very first day I was stunned, because there were high, high walls, maybe 12 feet. There were men with guns guarding the walls. I said, "My God, don't they know I volunteered to help?" I felt like a prisoner of war! That was the very first day, I got that shock!

Interviewer: It was around the perimeter?

Mr. Almond: Yes, uh huh. It wasn't very much longer that I was doing guard duty myself, emptying clothes lines and such military things as that, all for the purpose of discipline. And then food! Because we had this grocery store my mother worked in, and father, they were always busy, busy, busy, there just was no time to take care of their three sons. I had my first meal, I remember it was a Sunday evening, and we went and had supper. It was a real nice meal, as I recall -- chicken, very well made.

Interviewer: And how did that compare with your mother's cooking?

M**r. Almond:** Much better! My mother used a technique -- she'd be in the store and our house was in the back, an apartment in back. And when she'd smell things burning, it was done. She was a good cook but she just didn't have the time. That's a story in itself, the story of our living in that grocery store business. She had three sons and all of three of 'em, our goal in life was to work our way out of that store. And yet when they graduated college, my two brothers graduated college, there was no work for them. It was the Depression years. So what my father did -- he was a very ingenious person -- he opened up a second store so that each brother would have a store. We were going to open a third store but the war came along and the whole thing was wiped out.

Interviewer: You were telling me about the first day of boot camp and the food?

Mr. Almond: Anyway, we went to boot camp. That meal was so great but there wasn't enough of it, so I didn't know how to deal with the Navy, and I didn't have enough to eat. So I cleaned off the plate, put the stuff away like I was supposed to, went out the back door, went around the front door, and had a second meal. That was the last time I felt better fed in the Navy.

From boot camp I went to Tacoma Park, Maryland to a school, Bliss Electric School, a fine old-time electric school. They went through all the fundamentals. It was a short period and I enjoyed living, going to school, and being able to take liberty in Washington, DC. It was fabulous, I had a few relatives there and they were most welcoming.

That in itself was an interesting story -- there was a huge hunk of my mother's family living

there, even some of my father's family were there in Washington, DC. They welcomed me like I was family -- I didn't know who these people were, but they treated me just royally. Would you believe that today I communicated with one of those people? A girl that I just thought a lot of in those days.

Interviewer: What do you think was the reason that you were treated like that, that it surprised you?

Mr. Almond: They were family who I didn't know – see I knew nothing of them. Later I tried to ask my mother, "Who are these people and how are they related?" She explained it to me. It was too complex or she didn't explain it well enough, but now I know, because I've been doing genealogical work these many years, so I have everybody laid out on a map. That woman that I talked to today, she's 85, I'm 91. She's related to me on two sides of the family, isn't that amazing? We enjoy talking to each other because we're the same age group and we could talk about things that she can't talk about to her children or I can't talk about my background.

From Tacoma Park, Maryland, after that schooling in the fundamentals of radio and electronics -- you had to make a big decision at that point, whether you wanted to go into the airborne field -- naval aviation -- or the seaborne.

Interviewer: Either on a ship or a plane.

Mr. Almond: Ship or plane. Again, my ignorance of the Navy was showing. I had no idea what naval aviation was about: I pictured little airplanes hooked on the back of battleships. And here the Navy was developing this whole idea of a war that was fundamentally using aircraft carriers, big ones, famous ones that you've heard of, and little ones, called escort carriers that would probably take just a couple squadrons of airplanes.

Anyway, I chose the aircraft, again without knowing what that was all about. They sent me to a very fabulous school down in Ward Island, Texas, near Corpus Christi, Texas, in a very isolated place. Because the radar was a super-secret at that time, probably as much as the atomic bomb was.

Interviewer: What was radar referred to at that time?

Mr. Almond: That was the point -- it was NOT referred to. You never used that term "radar."

Interviewer: So what did you use?

Mr. Almond: We talked about "radio." In fact our rating badges reflected the old-fashioned sparks, didn't even have aviation wings. They didn't even have those ratings in those days. But the word "radar" was not be used: once you stepped out of that base you were not to use it. They threatened you and everything, but the school itself was

pretty fabulous. You spent four hours, the entire morning, learning the theories of things, and the afternoons you spent in the shop, doing hands-on work. That was wonderful for me; I didn't appreciate the theories behind things but the practical was very, very nice.

Interviewer: Was there something in particular that you worked on? Or did you get a variety?

Mr. Almond: In airborne radar there are so many different models of these things, from the earliest, that were literally not even American-built, they were English or Canadian. The British were ahead of us in the development of radar, because of the very necessity. You'll recall they had the Battle of Britain, in which radar was very much involved, and it did a wonderful job. Winston Churchill gave these British air force people credit for having so few and creating so much -- great work.

We made it through there and then we were given assignments on the West Coast. Again, this was mysterious -- why the West Coast, why not the East Coast? Afterwards you realized this was all the preparations for the invasion of Japan, which fortunately for a lot of us did not occur. I just had all sorts of assignments on the West Coast. Starting out -- at some point I was sent to a refresher school on Treasure Island, where we learned about shipboard radars. It was called a refresher course but it was strictly learning about shipboard radars. We went to that school, then I taught at the Alameda Naval Air Station School. That was very boring.

Interviewer: did you like best about Treasure Island?

Mr. Almond: Nothing in particular. In fact it was a space between San Francisco and Oakland, and liberty could be spent in San Francisco, so I had a sample of each. To this day I like Oakland better than I like San Francisco! I'm one in a million, everybody else loves San Francisco.

Interviewer: You mentioned how it was new for you to leave the Chicago area. How did you find it -- you went from there, you were in Maryland, you were in Texas, now you're in California? Do you have any impressions?

Mr. Almond: Completely, yes. The world is a lot nicer than Chicago! Every place was fascinating to me.

Interviewer: Probably the weather was very different, was it?

Mr. Almond: Very different. It was much milder. Washington DC's like a southern state as far as the weather was concerned.

Interviewer: Is that one of the reasons you ended up in California? How long have you been here?

Mr. Almond: I've been here since 1960. 52 years.

Interviewer: Almost a native!

Mr. Almond: Yeah.

Interviewer: Well, let's go back to your experiences in Treasure Island.

Mr. Almond: Well, at Treasure Island we just studied the radars. My next assignment, I think, was Seattle, Washington. I was part of the CASU -- "CASU" standing for Carrier Aircraft Service Unit. I had a job in the shop, the electronics shop. One particular day that comes to my mind, they brought in a radar, an ASB radar, to be repaired. I opened it up -- it had tubes in it about the size of that bottle. And the things were glowing just like a neon light in color! I immediately said, "Hey, that tube is gassing; they didn't properly make the thing." I replaced it and got it tuned up, made sure it was right, sent it out to the line again. That same day they must have brought in as many as ten or more sets, and practically every one of them had the same problems. It was a lot of work, but it wasn't terribly hard.

Interviewer: What caused the problem, do you know?

Mr. Almond: Yes, it was definitely a manufacturing problem. Everything was brand new. They didn't know how to make tubes that big -- they had to pump out all the air; it was just a manufacturing defect. But the symptom was so beautiful, they'd light up -- instead of being white or glowing like a light bulb, it was purple or whatever in color. Just a real easy diagnosis. So I went through about ten of 'em. I thought, a hard day's work, fortunately I don't have too many like that.

So the next day, I'm out taking a walk and the chief comes along, a young chief, my superior, rating wise. And he starts talking to me, at first friendly, and he says, "You were a butcher before you came into the Navy, weren't you?" I didn't know how to answer that! I wasn't a good butcher, I did butchery but I wasn't a very good one. Then I realized he's being real snotty, real kind of jealous. Why's he jealous? Then it dawned on me that the work that I had done the previous day must have been reported upstairs to the officer's quarters. That implied it was a jealousy sort of thing: here's a butcher boy fixing radar sets and getting all the credit. That's the way life is, I found out -- you get credit where you least expect it.

From there I was assigned to a squadron, Torpedo Squadron 50. I joined them in Klamath Falls, Oregon, down the coast from where I had been in Seattle. That was one indicator of how hellish war could be. These torpedo planes kept crashing and crashing and killing and killing until there was nothing, literally, left to go to war. We went up and down the coast practicing torpedo dropping at Whidbey Island, Washington.

Interviewer: They're called torpedo planes?

Mr. Almond: Right, torpedo bombers. When I first joined the squadron -- first let me say that I am a very cowardly person. I wouldn't go on a roller coaster if you paid me. And yet, because all the people in the squadron were flying, it wasn't my job to fly, but I

volunteered to fly anyhow. And I made it back safely, as you can see.

Interviewer: When you say "fly," does it mean you were working on instruments or were you the pilot?

Mr. Almond: Oh no, neither. I was just a passenger; the official term would have been radio man. What these planes were doing constantly was they'd line up as a team, maybe six of them, then through some command they'd all start diving one at a time. It was the worst amusement park ride you ever saw. It was like being in a truck and falling off a cliff, that's what it feels like. A horrible thing. They eventually pull out, but we had two planes that didn't pull out. They were practicing in Lakeview, Oregon, practicing rocket firing, where they all dive at the same and they're all supposed to pull out at the same time. But one guy pulled out into a second one, and they both went down. The two pilots came out of it alive, four crewmen died. That was two planes.

The skipper of the squadron, he was an older man, he was probably 30 years old -- he convinced an air crewman to come with him to practice something or other over Lake Klamath. The guy said, no, I don't like that -- I even remember the guy's name, Hergood, it came back to me at a later date -- he did go with the skipper of the squadron. They practiced something; they dove into Lake Klamath Falls and never pulled out. That's three planes.

Then we had another plane, it lost its wing. The wing came off. They found after -- I don't remember who died or who didn't die -- but afterwards they said that, there's two companies made this particular plane, Grumman and Martin, and you cannot use one company's wings with the other guy's, even though they're supposed to be identical planes, s that's the way they learned things during wartime. So that's another plane that we lost. How many are we up to? Four. That was about it. We had other near accidents. They finally dissolved the squadron.

Interviewer: It doesn't sound like you were content.

Mr. Almond: I stopped flying as soon as they started killing themselves. It was awful.

Then I went to a much calmer thing. They sent me to a ground radar outfit. GIC, Ground Intercept Command, which was a fabulous use of radar. These radars are giant Army-like radars, huge things, great big antennas. The stuff we were working with was little airborne stuff; these were like a house trailer.

Another little story right during that period: on the West Coast, there's only one place during the war that was ever bombed. A Japanese submarine came close, north of Santa Barbara and fired at some storage tanks, as I recall. Have you by any rare chance heard of it?

Interviewer: I've heard of it but I don't recall the details.

Mr. Almond: Goleta, California. I think I was in Seattle at the time, they sent me down there after the fact to learn about the radar they were using. It was a radar that looked at a low angle over the water to see if it could spot submarines. I didn't learn much.

Interviewer: This was the United States radar?

Mr. Almond: Yes, American radar.

Interviewer: And they had it along the coast?

Mr. Almond: Yes, exactly. Looking for just that sort of thing. I don't know if they put it in before or after. I don't think the submarine did much damage, I don't know if we ever detected him or not. Anyway, that was the only place in America that was ever bombed during World War II.

There was another incident in Oregon -- the Japanese had developed balloons, small balloons, which somehow gave fire bombs when they landed. I don't know how the whole thing worked. Essentially it did no damage; it caused a small fire in some forest area. In fact, one of the places it did cause a fire was in Lakeview, Oregon, which is where the two planes of ours were using as fire practice.

Interviewer: In California, I understand they used what was called ballast balloons? Was that to detect aviation? Did you have anything to do with that?

Mr. Almond: No.

Interviewer: I was curious. Here in the harbor I believe they used them. In Wilmington, they had what people referred to as ballast balloons; I'm not quite sure what they were.

Mr. Almond: They had an entire radar setup, Nike radar, in San Pedro. In fact, the Torrance Airport was involved in that, too. Anyhow, my experience with the Ground Control Intercept, GCI, there wasn't much work for me to do because they were huge radar sets, and you just read meters on them to make sure they're functioning OK.

They had gotten to the point -- and this was making life worrisome -- where they actually divided up the company into different teams for the first wave of the invasion, second wave, and that sort of thing. I was selected in the first wave because I wasn't married.

Interviewer: Was that the excuse you were given or is that what you concluded?

Mr. Almond: No, that was the reasoning behind it, how can you argue with it? But the radar that you would use was a very antiquated one--maybe that was just for training purposes, I don't know, one of the earliest ones.

Here's an interesting little sidelight. While I was in the squadron we'd go to different places all along the West Coast for different training. I think we were up near Yakima,

Washington, near Walla Walla, Washington. The purpose of the training was to practice night landings on carriers. There we had one of the planes -- in order to land the plane on a carrier you had a great big wire, which hooks onto a tail thing. During practice that's exactly the simulation they have. One of the pilots landed and practically pulled off the tail end of the plane. I just don't know why, I never heard the analysis. But that was just the practice.

On the liberty time I went to the nearby town, which turned out to be close to where they were building the atomic bomb. We danced with the pretty little girls in town, and they had a big secret. They had a big secret.

Interviewer: They told you they had a secret?

Mr. Almond: They had the big secret! You'd be dancing with 'em and they'd be telling you all the things that they're not supposed to say. Atomic bomb, you know? It's a big, big secret. Finally I found out that they had developed "a big bomb." I thought, well, great, great. Anything's better than TNT, you need something better, so I dismissed it. So I had the great secret of World War II, and I just dismissed it as being an improvement on what they already had. In fact, this was the reason that all these people that were preparing to go on the West Coast, they didn't.

Interviewer: How did you find out when "the big bomb," when it was used? Where were you at the time?

Mr. Almond: I can't remember where. You're supposed to remember where you were when things happen!

Interviewer: Not necessarily! What was your reaction -- did you realize then that this is what they were talking about?

Mr. Almond: I don't think I put the pieces together at that time. It was only thinking about it later. You just don't know what's going on, really. Nobody's telling you anything. The Navy used to show pictures of the actual war going on, planes bombing, bombing, places you'd never heard of, strange names in the South Pacific. Your ignorance is fabulous; you just don't know what's going on. And it's supposed to be that way! Today, one of my hobbies is to read about World War II, where you get an honest rendition of it. No propaganda, no anything.

Interviewer: Well, that's what we're gaining from you, today!

Mr. Almond: But all I'm revealing is my ignorance!

Interviewer: No, but we're getting facts or feelings.

Mr. Almond: The great thing about World War II, that they really don't give credit for, is how every single person was at war, whether you're a child selling penny saving stamps,

or war bonds. If you were in the movie business you sold war bonds, and Reagan sold war bonds. You collected junk. I wasn't there, but I learned later.

Yet now you watch these wars nowadays, they're very, very specialized. You have a specialized team that goes in there, gets the enemy and comes out, and we all applaud them. It was so different.

We were a country that was completely naked when the war started, when we were bombed at Pearl Harbor. The first troops that went into training, went down to Tennessee, they didn't have guns for them to train with. They used broomsticks. That's how unprepared -- that just gives you an idea of how unprepared we were. Well, that was even before Pearl Harbor. When Pearl Harbor came, we thought the world was at an end because they knocked out all our battleships.

And yet, as it turned out, in a sense it was the greatest thing yet because the whole war was now aircraft carriers. I don't know if we have any battleships left in the Navy today or not. I don't think so. The Iowa was just put into San Pedro Harbor, Los Angeles Harbor, here.

Interviewer: Did you ever get on a carrier?

Mr. Almond: No. The only time I was on a ship, in fact, was at Monterey. Some little destroyer had radar problems, they invited us to come over and see if we could do anything for them.

Interviewer: You were in the Navy but?

Mr. Almond: Again, that was part of my not understanding what the Navy was all about. But who could? Do you really think today about escort carriers? Probably never heard of them. Yet they turned them out en masse. An aircraft carrier would take years to build; it's a city, a world in itself. But a little escort carrier, that was most useful in the Atlantic where they had these German submarines. The Pacific, they used the big carriers.

Interviewer: Going back to something you mentioned before, I was a young girl; I was born in '39. I have images and experiences that are very minor. But you related the ration stamps and things that I remember. How do you relate the country and the times of that era with today?

Mr. Almond: I'm reading a book exactly about the Depression years. Michael Hiltzik, a reporter for the LA Times, wrote a book. It's just like reading today's story. And Bernanke, the head of the Federal Reserve, he's supposed to be an expert on the Depression years and the economics of it. But it is so much like today, and the remedies are going to be like that, too.

Interviewer: What about the war aspects of World War II and what is happening today? You mentioned how people, the entire country was involved.

Mr. Almond: That's what's bad about today. We're all spectators at the wonderful work the troops are doing. But it's not the same. Unfortunately, it reminds me of Germany's view of these things. You had the Junkers, a specialized aristocracy of the military, these were the people that should have been running the country, they were a far better group than Hitler and his bunch. I think they even advised Hitler not to go to war, they recognized our huge capacity for production.

That's what we're faced with right now -- the terrible part of today's system, we have become policemen of the world. And that's the worst conceivable thing you want to be. We try to get others involved, but we're always the big leaders in these things and it's not good.

Interviewer: Do you think other people have the same opinion as you? Or is it because you've been doing extensive reading and looking at wars more than the average person?

Mr. Almond: I don't know how to answer that. I was at the gym a couple months ago, and a fellow was wearing some kind of a military cap. I asked him about it and he said, yeah, he's in the military. I said, "I was in World War II." He said, "We thank you for your service." I laughed, I said, "What were our options?" Hitler had taken over all of Europe! Honestly, most of my time in the service I thought we were on the losing end. We were very likely going to lose that war. The way it was reported, each country in Europe was invaded and conquered, and they'd show maps of it, and pretty soon the whole of Europe was black. That was Hitler country. The German troops seemed to be excellent troops; we can't beat that!

That's the other thing. This country as much as we hate it, Russia then, and we almost hate them as much today, the fact that we worked with them to conquer Hitler is practically the greatest thing that happened in World War II. Nobody pictures it as such.

Interviewer: Why do you say that?

Mr. Almond: Because, suppose you were my enemy and yet somebody was doing something nasty, and all of a sudden we agree. Even though we hate our guts, we agree that we'll work together to get that third guy. That's the same situation we had with Russia. We've never had great terms with Russia; we've hated them for their Communism. My own background is my parents left Russia, Belarus, to come to the United States. So I know that Russian people are just like American people, they're one and the same.

That was a great thing, though. We even hated the Russians because they went into an alliance with Germany at one point early in the war. When we went into Africa, when American troops went into Africa, the first participation in the war, the Russians were already fighting in Stalingrad. Stalingrad turned out to be the turning point of World War II, the first time the Germans lost in substantial numbers. Three quarters of a million men were killed or captured, and ol' Hitler's sitting back there saying, "Don't give up! Die if you have to, but don't give up!"

Anyhow, we got into the war about that time and we were still very poorly trained. We had enough equipment and everything but it wasn't battle-tested equipment and the German troops beat the hell out of us the first time we met. I can't remember the name of the battle but it was a disaster.

I'm getting away from my story into the real story!

Interviewer: No, but it's interesting!

Mr. Almond: It is. And if you read those same stories today you get a much more accurate picture than you could ever do beforehand. It was always the lie or not telling you the whole story. Like I said to you, one of the very greatest things that happened in World War II, we worked with the Russians, we supplied them with tons of material, airplanes and Jeeps, and then we also tried to supply a direct route through the Leningrad area. That was the worst thing yet. The Germans had planes that could fly over there and the weather was atrocious. Submarines would attack and they'd sink the ships and the men and supplies would all go down. These were all merchant marines, they weren't official military people, it was horrible.

Interviewer: How do you feel about the role that the Americans had toward the merchant seaman or the merchant marines at that time? Do you think they have received?

Mr. Almond: We felt they were inconsequential. "Who are they, they don't even have uniforms." Some of their ships would have a single cannon with probably a Navy crewman for the gun, but that was their chief defense. It was horrible. If you ever saw pictures of that Murmansk Run...ever hear of that?

Interviewer: Yes. Getting back to you and the story here -- you were on the West Coast. So you saw war, you heard about it over there, but you were related, in a sense, to what was happening here.

Mr. Almond: The fact that America could go into two wars, two big wars -- any one of them would have been sufficient for anybody to conquer, but we went to two. What worked in our favor: we didn't have to have massive amounts, tens of thousands of troops, because all our conquering was done in little islands, one at a time. The battles of these islands were horrible, just murderous. I actually talked to some of those men when they'd come back. They described how horrible they were. They'd call for a medic, a corpsman, in the battles and the corpsman got hit -- it was horrible. It didn't take a lot of men, though -- 10,000 men could usually take an island.

And then there was this MacArthur guy, he had an ego that was bigger than the war itself! They could have completely bypassed the Philippine Islands if they wanted to, and just headed toward Japan and the islands leading to it. Anyhow, that's not my war.

Interviewer: How do you think you escaped having to lift a gun?

Mr. Almond: Just by choosing the Navy. They taught us how to use a gun; I think one day's field work learning how to use a machine gun. I even did guard duty on an officer in Seattle. He was a bad boy -- he was this hotshot pilot that was zooming over Seattle to show off for his girlfriend, so they arrested him and put him under armed guard -- me. I had no knowledge of the gun I was carrying. The guy who was the pilot, he was a real mischief-maker. He got a group of the people in his bachelor officer's quarters and had them singing a duet. Then he found out I knew how to play the violin, so he hands me a violin. Talk about the silly stuff in the Navy! An officer came in and he broke it up.

These pilots tended to be a crazy bunch, a reckless bunch. I guess they had the feeling they were going to get killed anyhow, so why not be crazy?

Interviewer: How do you acquire a violin in the Navy?

Mr. Almond: It was there in the bachelor officer's quarters! I don't know where it popped up from.

Interviewer: So it wasn't yours.

Mr. Almond: No, I was not that fascinated. My mother had to have a musician in our family so I was selected for it. I played for about ten years, from seven to when I went to junior college.

Interviewer: Do you play it now?

Mr. Almond: No I don't. I don't enjoy it that much. In fact, my love of music is diminished. I have other things that are far more fascinating to me right now. I have a wonderful invention that I'd like to put on the record.

Interviewer: I notice you brought things to share, too!

Mr. Almond: I became deafened a few years back, five, six, seven years. I tried all sort of things and then I finally got into the hearing aid business and tried them, but they weren't satisfying at all. What the hearing aid did then, and almost does now -- it allows you to hear sound but not understand what's being said.

After I got out of the service, I worked in some real neat jobs. One was for the FAA at the Chicago airport as a maintenance technician; that was very interesting. From there I came to California. I went back to college and I got a Master's Degree from USC. After a full career of working at various defense industries in the radar field, I retired. Somewhere along the line I became deafened. The hearing aids were just not that good. They allow you to hear but not to understand.

So I went on the Internet shopping for a hearing aid, looking for somebody that says, "We amplify consonants." No one even said the word; there was no mention of it. I recognized what you can't hear are the consonants. I figured out in detail why you can't hear

consonants. The amplitude, the volume of it is one ten-thousandth as great as vowels. The vowels come from your throat, from your vocal cords, and you can make them as loud as you want or as quiet as you want. You can still understand if you move your mouth and lips.

Now we get into Darwin's theories -- we came up from the ape kingdom and somehow became superior to all the other apes. And what caused us to become superior to all the apes was the fact that we developed what we call speech. And what is speech? Speech is a combination of the old language we spoke for millions of years like all the other animal kingdom -- it was a beautiful thing, it protected you from other animals. If there was danger we'd just holler. We use the same techniques today.

But they all used just that one vocal cord system, nothing else. Maybe 100,000 years ago something fabulous happened. Some primitive, whether it be ape or ape-man or what, we don't know, they developed another unique sound system, having nothing to do with this down here in the vocal cords. It had to do with making distinctive new noises, we'll call them that. The noises came out like this [demonstrates consonants]. Recognize that?

Interviewer: Consonants.

Mr. Almond: If I asked you, "What are the consonants?" you'd say, "P, C, D" and I'd say, "No, you're wrong. They are [demonstrates consonant sounds]." That's the basic fault of hearing aids. But here's where the genius came in -- they didn't take those new noises and add them to the old noises, they created a code. Ever hear of the Morse code? That's what we have for our speech. It's a code: sounds from here, sounds from there; noises from there, sounds from there; back and forth. It's a beautiful code.

And who invented it? We'll probably never know. Anthropologists, paleontologists, they haven't even recognized that it's a code. In fact, I read on this subject and they said, "A cognitive revolution occurred about 100,000 years ago which caused the ape-man, or whatever he was, to evolve into a human."

At that point, if you knew the code and I knew the code, we could communicate with each other in ways you could never, never do before. I could say something like [demonstrates sound] and I said [demonstrates different sound], and you knew the code, you'd say, "Oh, he's talking about something that happened previously." I could say sounds that tell you what things are going to happen in the future. I could tell you things that are bigger, or smaller. All these are basic constructions of history, 20 years ago, 100,000 years ago -- I can tell you things are gonna happen in the future. "We're going to have a meteorite in the future." I could tell you, "This is bigger than that." In mathematics you talk about "greater than" or "less than". The whole basis of our whole civilization of becoming a human being is locked into this, going from this one language, to the coded two languages.

Now, the hearing problem. How does that relate? What you need is to amplify the consonants, just that simple. I actually have circuitry -- I can't create a hearing aid that will do it, but I can create a public address system, an amplifier, which can do that. What you

need to do is put a detector near your voice box and one, just the ordinary microphone, and put them together, and get the difference between them. Electronically, those are not difficult tricks. So you have a pure consonant coming out of those two being put together. You can amplify that, you can do anything. You really don't need this voice box at all, that's good for hollering for your next door neighbor, but I can talk as quiet as can be and you can still understand me. There are people in this world called lip readers who can't even hear the sound at all. They can read your lips. Most of the information, 90% -- it's not perfect, but it's better than nothing.

Interviewer: So that's your theory, or you've developed --

Mr. Almond: I'm at the point of actually trying to build it, but my skill levels are so far behind. But anybody who's in that field right now could build it in no time.

Interviewer: Would this have any use in the Navy?

Mr. Almond: It would be used wherever you have people talk to you. It would be useful.

Interviewer: It could be part of communication, you're saying?

Mr. Almond: You see, there are people in this world who hardly move their lips at all and you can hardly understand them. The reason why is that consonants come out of the shaping of your mouth. The more I distort my mouth, the better you can understand me readily.

That's the whole idea behind it. It isn't a complex idea. It's difficult to build a hearing aid to do that, but you can make an amplifier that will strictly do what I just imitated. The reason the hearing aid is difficult is because you can't get the two sources you need. You need the sound coming out of your mouth, which is OK, but you also need the sound coming out of here, so you'll know what to subtract from what.

Interviewer: That's very interesting, and I wish you luck!

Mr. Almond: Well, it won't be me that builds it. I've written it up on the internet and e-magazines and a lot of places, but nobody picks it up. People who are hard of hearing, they'll pick it up occasionally and say, "Hey, where can we buy this?

Interviewer: What are some of the things you brought today?

Mr. Almond: Just anything to refresh my mind. This is a Navy discharge. This is a refresher course that I took. It was time to ship out and they offered me a deal to go back to refresher school in Corpus Christi where I had gone to the primary school.

Interviewer: You were in the service four years, right?

Mr. Almond: Three-and-a-half.

Interviewer: And do you think a refresher was to keep you in longer?

Mr. Almond: No, it's just that the radar business was evolving so rapidly. The ones I had studied when I first went through there were just simplicity itself. All you would do is take a strong, high-frequency radio signal and stop it and start it, stop it and start it. You'd send out a pulse and then you'd wait. You'd wait for a target coming back. If it was a piece of metal or a submarine, it would send back a target, and you could see it, it would be displayed on there. Simplicity itself. Later on they had what they called PPIs, Planned Position Indicators, radars which are very elaborate. They almost gave you a map of where the targets are.

Interviewer: What brought you to California?

Mr. Almond: The Navy sent me there.

Interviewer: No, after you were discharged, excuse me.

Mr. Almond: I had this real fine job working for the FAA at the Chicago airport.

Interviewer: You said you were maintenance, right?

Mr. Almond: Electronic maintenance, took care of the tower, took care of the teletype -- everything. In fact we even had to climb towers to change light bulbs. That has got to be one of the scariest things in your life. Don't forget, I'm the guy who doesn't like roller coasters! I only had to do it once, but I had seen people start climbing those things that couldn't go any farther, they just froze up. It's scary. All your instincts tell you, this is dangerous.

Interviewer: So you had that FAA job for how long?

Mr. Almond: From '47 to about '50, about three years. Then my boss told me off. He said, "Either you get out here and shovel the snow when they call you, or find yourself another job." He had been away from the airport for about two months, had pneumonia, so I was taking care of that whole O'Hare Airport. It's not what it is today, today it's huge, it was a primitive, early thing, 1950, '49. I had to take care of it by myself.

It was a nightmare. Maintenance men would come in during the day, put in a new electronic box, and go home. I was on call. They'd call me in the middle of the night, "The tower's out, the complete tower's out!" The guys are back to using red lights, spot lights and green lights to have the planes land and take off. It was nightmarish.

I'd come out there in the middle of the night, didn't know what to do. I didn't know what these guys had done during the day! I'd go back to the most primitive things. I would run wires from the fourth floor down to the control room where they had all the electronics, just run bare wires up and down. Got 'em back on the air until the next morning when the

maintenance guys came and found -- Oh, they'd installed a relay box, a box full of relays, and one of the contacts on it had welded together. Caused the whole airport to be down.

It was a nightmare. I had just gotten married; I was living in my father's rooming house. It was pretty desperate living; it was right after the war. My wife was very unhappy with our living conditions, she was young, and --

Interviewer: She was from Chicago also?

Mr. Almond: No, she was from Detroit.

Interviewer: So the same area.

Mr. Almond: Not really. A world apart! Two months of this, my boss didn't die from his pneumonia, he came back to work, and as things happened, it snowed that night and knocked off one of the electronic markers. They couldn't get hold of me immediately so they called my boss. He came out there and he was shoveling snow. He was madder than hell. So I get out there a little bit later, whatever my wife and I were doing, I don't know -- I get out there and he tells me off in the worst possible way. He doesn't say, "How'd you get by in the two months that I wasn't here? Did you have any help?" Nothing, nothing, nothing. He tells me off. He said, "Either be here when you're called or get yourself another job."

I thought about it, not too long. I had about 30 days of vacation time coming. Get me that vacation time and I'll go out and see if I can find another job. I get over to our rooming house. I told my wife before we were married, we're going to live in California; I don't know when it will be. We had just gotten a new car, which was very hard to get. We loaded it with everything, said goodbye to my mother and father, and headed to California.

We get out here and found a nice little place in Silverlake. For us it was beautiful -- today I look at the place and it's a run-down junk house! I needed to get a job quickly. I knew enough about this area, I went down to the San Pedro shipyards and asked if they had a job there. He told me what the job was, it was checking out radars on the shakedown cruise. You'd be out there for a while checking out the radars and making sure it was right. We were just fresh out here, my wife had never been away from Detroit practically, and she'd be by herself, so I said, no, I couldn't take it.

So instead of going to work I registered in school. They had what they called the GI Bill; I figured I'll use that for unemployment insurance until I find a good job.

I registered in school. I didn't take it too seriously -- it was the University of Southern California. I didn't take it too seriously because I knew I wasn't going to stick around once I got a job. Anyway, it wasn't too hard. We got along on the small amount of money that they were giving us, so I took another semester, and another semester. I think eight years later I was finished with USC. I got a Bachelor's Degree and then I got a Master's Degree.

It was very difficult for me, because I didn't have certain adequate background requirements which the school should have pointed out to me and required me to take more math. I had something like, three courses in junior college, and only one course in calculus. You need a minimum of three courses to work in that field: integral calculus, differential calculus, integral equations. I only had one, and I never took any more. I had to learn my mathematics in the courses where they were using it. Well, that was difficult and one of the bravest things I did and one of the dumbest things I ever did in my life. It created greater hardship than it would have been if I had had a good math background.

Interviewer: But in the end you came out with a degree. How do you feel that the GI Bill helped?

Mr. Almond: That's the greatest thing they ever invented. They need another one today and tomorrow and the next year -- it should be permanent. When the university system in this country first started out, some of the first universities came out were agricultural colleges. This country needed people to work in the field of agriculture. I think it was free for the asking, to go to agriculture school. They still have schools called A&M. Free education should be a part of our country.

Interviewer: Did you see that many men after serving took advantage of it?

Mr. Almond: Yes, they did. I didn't go back to school until about 1950. I got the Bachelor's Degree in '54, going full time, and then I started working in the aerospace industry and continued to take one course at a time. One time I took two courses and I realized that was too hard! Then it took me four years to get that Master's Degree.

Interviewer: Why do you think men at that time took advantage of it? What were the conditions that these men were faced with? You and others like you?

Mr. Almond: I can't speak for the others, but I can just say in general, everyone just thought it was just the greatest thing in the world. And it was! They should have it today. When I hear these kids graduating with bills of $50,000, that's ridiculous! You should be paid for going to school. Going to school is harder than any job I've ever had. You have to sit on your butt, it is not natural. Unless in some strange way you learn how to be a priest, you know: you and the book! You're an engineer, every night problems!

Interviewer: We've covered a lot about the military, is there anything else that you find that was important, especially during the time you served, or maybe about the veterans today?

Mr. Almond: Well, I feel sorry that the country and the military is going the direction that it is. As I said before, being the world's policeman -- of course we're the most powerful, so it seems appropriate that the most powerful should be the one telling the rest of world how to behave. But it's not good for the country as a whole.

Interviewer: Would I be accurate in saying that one of the things that you acquired after

serving was the benefit of an education? You had the discipline when you went in, and you got a career, in a sense.

Mr. Almond: Absolutely correct. I could have made the entire rest of my life based on the experience I had in the Navy. The greatest thing about the Navy -- they really don't have much use for the seaman, the guy who swabs the deck. They do need people with skills. I told one of my neighbors whose son was going in, I said, "He plays it right he'll have a skill level that'll fix him for the rest of his life."

Interviewer: So you feel it's true even today.

Mr. Almond: Very much true. If you go to school, you don't even have the opportunity to see the real world. It's all very theoretical, mathematical. That was an advantage to the fact that I didn't go back to school right away. I had the Navy training and the post-war training, and finally going back to school. I made decent grades; that's about all you can say for it, which is in some ways remarkable -- like I said, I didn't have the proper academic background to go as far as I did.

Interviewer: You mentioned that you read a lot about World War II. Is there anything that you think is important for us to remember? You've talked about different things, but one thing that really is a lesson that we should remember. You've talked about education, jobs...

Mr. Almond: Even our military preparation. The military is doing this fabulous -- for the military, and I guess for all of us -- they're taking these latest developments, we have satellites, developing targeting systems, where a pilot can sit in an air-conditioned room on the ground and observe something happening 3,000 miles away and aim a missile at them. It's taking all the developments of satellites, and developing them into first class weapons where you don't have to kill so many men in order to accomplish things.

Interviewer: You also talked a lot about your experiences in going to boot camp, or starting the service. What about the discharge, at the other end?

Mr. Almond: Well, at the discharge end, I was escorting troops, Navy people going back to the other parts of the country. It was just routine. In fact, I was working out of Terminal Island. That was a stinkin' mess. They had oil wells there, and when the wind blew one way you'd get the stink of the oil, if it blew the other way you'd have the fish cannery. I don't know which was worse. It was not a pleasurable place to be, but it wasn't supposed to be.

People were trying to get out of the service as quickly as they could, hauling across the country in some of the most primitive railroad cars you ever saw. You couldn't always get food on time. I remember one time we were so hungry -- we didn't have high priority on the tracks, so one time they sidetracked the train with all the troops in it and didn't give us anything to eat. Another train on the opposite track was carrying sugar cane in stalks, we take some of that, tried to eat it – impossible, but when you hear the stories of World

War I, it was god awful.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that you feel that you'd like someone, someday to read about or to hear about in your experiences?

Mr. Almond: My own life has been pretty well: study, study, study, one way or the other, mixed in with a little bit of practical work. In fact, my high school, going back to high school, I went to a place called Lake Technical High School, it was a brand new school in Chicago. It was a first class academic thing, but they also had shops. I remember taking wood shop. That is so great of an idea, and it should be continued today. They do it in some very awkward, inefficient way. We have SCROC, for example, in Torrance -- Southern California...

Interviewer: Regional Occupation Center.

Mr. Almond: There you go, thank you! It's fairly good, but not good enough. It should be incorporated in the academic world. There are some schools they used to have where you'd go to school for a number of years and then you'd go out into the industry and actually work. That is so good, because then it's not all theoretical. That's the lesson that is really valuable that should be pushed farther.

Interviewer: If there are no other comments, I would like to thank you for your interview!

Mr. Almond: My pleasure!