U.S. NAVY MEDICAL DEPARTMENT ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

# ORAL HISTORY WITH LCDR (ret.) ALPHONSE GALLITANO, MC, USNR

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TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW

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**Interview with former LCDR Alphonse Gallitano, MC, USNR, medical officer aboard USS *Oriskany*, 1967.**

**Where did you grow up?**
Waltham, [MA]. I attended the Waltham public schools.

**Where did you go to college?**
Boston College. And then I went to Boston University Medical School.

**When did you graduate from medical school?**
In ’61.

**How did you get involved with the Navy?**
I was drafted.

**Did you have a choice as to what service you go into?**
When I was drafted, I told them I’d join the Navy. And that’s how it happened. My two brothers were also in the Navy.

**Had you been through your residency yet?**
I had gotten my draft notice while I was in a fellowship in Houston at M.D. Anderson Cancer Hospital. After that I wanted to do my second year but they told me I was running out of time. So I had to make up my mind and that’s when I went in. That was September of ’67.

**What do you recall about going in the Navy? Did you have any orientation or did they just tell you to report and you reported?**
I told them I didn’t need much orientation. During my training at M.D. Anderson, there were a few officers who were physicians, who were training with me. So I learned a lot from them even before I went in. And once I reported to the ship, Al Adeeb was very close and he was my mentor.

**How did you two meet?**
We met on the ship.

**Was your first Navy assignment the *Oriskany*?**
Yes.

**Were you an orthopedic surgeon at that time?**
No. I was a general surgeon.

**According to Dr. Adeeb, you weren’t on the ship very long before**

**you were confronted with this particular incident. A pilot, Dennis Earl . . .**

Took a bullet through his leg.

**That's right. Dr. Adeeb was flying a tanker mission that day and on his radio he heard that a pilot had been wounded by ground fire and was in distress, losing blood, etc. Dr. Adeeb then relayed a message that he should inflate his flight suit. And by doing so, it would act somewhat like a tourniquet and stop the bleeding, which he did. And then he was able to make it back to the ship and landed successfully. Do you remember the operation you did on him?**

He had taken a large caliber round through his right lower leg, which shattered it. He had lost a fair amount of blood. We controlled the bleeding, gave him blood, and repaired his leg.

**Was it his tibia that was broken?**

Yes.

**And it was a pretty serious wound, then?**

Yes it was. He nearly lost the leg; it was nearly shot off.

**Had you ever seen an injury like that before?**

I hadn't seen wounds caused by high caliber bullets, but we had a "knife and gun club" in Boston which provided a bit of mayhem, so we got to see a fair number of those kinds of wounds.

**You obviously did a masterful job because he still has the leg.**

I was very well trained. I had been through 5 years of surgical training in Boston and another year in Houston.

**What were the actual mechanics of repairing that leg? Did it require a rod?**

No. I didn't put a rod in. We stripped all his clothing, irrigated it, debrided the dead and badly injured tissue, put him in traction, and while he was in traction, put him in a cast.

**I gather that the bone was fragmented.**

Yes it was.

**So you aligned the fragments, immobilized the leg, and hoped everything would rebond.**

Yes.

**It must have been a fairly extensive operation?**

No, not really. I think it only took an hour or two.

**And, I understand, that Dr. Adeeb assisted you.**
Yes.

**Dr. Adeeb told me that once your patient had been evacuated from the ship and ended up at the Naval Hospital in Pensacola, they looked at what you had done and said, "No further work is required. This is a perfect job and we don't need to touch it." So they let it heal and that was it. And as I told you earlier, he still flies for the Navy. In fact, he's flying today. He's in good shape and displays no ill effects.**
I like to hear that.

**How long were you in the Navy?**
I was in for 2 years.

**What did you do when you got out?**
I went into practice right here in the Boston area–in Waltham and at Boston University.

**Were you a professor there?**
An assistant professor of surgery.

**It must have been really neat to have been back at your alma mater teaching?**
It was. I had a good time.

**Are you still in practice?**
No. I just retired in May.

**Do you get much time to spend at your place on the Cape?**
At this stage of the game, I can pretty much write free time for myself.

**I want to thank you for spending time with me today.**
You're quite welcome. Glad to do it.