

U.S. NAVY MEDICAL DEPARTMENT ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

ORAL HISTORY WITH HMCS (RET.) MARTIN MONACO, USN

CONDUCTED BY
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The date is January 8, 2016. Today we have the great pleasure of speaking with retired Senior Chief Martin Monaco as part of the BUMED Oral History Project.

Q: Again, Senior, I really appreciate you spending time with us today.

Now, oral histories are first and foremost narratives and all narratives must have a beginning. I would like to start off with your beginnings if you will. I know you were born in the Bronx, but you grew up in Weehawken. What do you remember about that time?

A: Well, I was born in the Bronx, but I don't remember much about that because my father died when I was five. And with my brother, less than a year later, we moved to Jersey. We lived there until I reached the age to join the Navy. During that period times were rough, and people often asked me, "Why'd you join the Navy?"

My answer is always, "I got tired of being hungry."

Q: What did your mother do?

A: My mother did what was called in those days, "Home Work."
It was hand embroidery and it would be piece work; she'd

bring it home and she'd make maybe 50 or 75 cents apiece for something that would take a few hours to make; and if the string of beads broke I'd re-string them for a penny a foot.

Q: With the name Serafina¹ was she from the old country?

A: Yes, she was. She was from the old country, and she never remarried. She raised my brother² and I at the end of what we used to call a "cupeen," which is a ladle. If we got out of line you were bound to get belted with it. Mama was 4'8," but was as firm and hard as hickory. She never tolerated backtalk or excuses. Times were hard enough and there was no room for foolishness. Like I said, I got hungry and I joined the Navy. My kid brother Leopoldo (Leo) stayed home and he worked his way through high school, college, law school, and retired as a judge of the New Jersey Superior Court.

Q: Wow. So you entered the Navy while still a teenager?

A: On my 17th birthday, to be exact.

Q: This is before you graduated high school, right?

¹ Serafina Sciarrello Monaco

² Hon. Leopoldo (Leo) Monaco

A: Right, I didn't finish high school as a civilian. I got to finish it after I enlisted in the Navy and finished Hospital Corps "A" School. While stationed at U.S. Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune I met a damn good HMC down there named John Koenig.³ After I got there I wanted to get my Liberty Card, but for about a month and a half I couldn't get one. One day somebody said, "Well, you better go see Chief Koenig." I went down to his office and told him my problem. His answer to me was, "You don't need one. You'll go ashore, get into fights with Marines and get in trouble. So you don't get one." When I started out the door he called out, "Hey Monaco, come here." I went back and he said, "You didn't finish high school?"

After I answered, "No," he said, "I'll tell you what. You go to Jacksonville (N.C.). You start taking courses and you'll have liberty every night you have a class." I did that and passed my high school equivalent at USAFI.⁴ A little while later I passed their one-year college equivalence and that was the start of my education. After I did that, I remember I got the certificate that I passed the USAFI test, I took it down to the HMC Koenig's office to tell him the news. He looked at me and didn't even

³ HMC John Koenig, USN. Chief Petty Officer that Monaco credits for getting him started on his education at Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune, NC.

⁴ GED, 28 January 1951, United States Armed Forces Institute (USAFI), Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune, NC

blink when he said, "When the hell do you start college?" I would have started then but they had a war going on in Korea.

Q: You came in at a very interesting time in the history of this country. Obviously, the war in Korea was not very popular, and probably the military was not at its pinnacle. Korea is often called the "Forgotten War." What do you recall about your experiences?

A: I did serve in Korea, but I'm very fortunate. When I finished Field Medical School,⁵ instead of being sent directly to Korea, I was assigned to the Third Marine Brigade, which was forming up in Camp Pendleton, and stood there for about a year.⁶ Then I got orders to go to Korea. By that time all the big crap was over and I got a very good assignment.⁷ I was assigned to the 1st Armored Amphibian Battalion located on the Kimpo Peninsula where we were dug in on a hill overlooking the Imjin River. Our tractors were armed with 75mm cannons which were utilized for "Indirect Fire" and would engage targets across the river and the island of Kangwa Do. At times we got into artillery duels with them. We were well and deep so

⁵ HMCS Monaco graduated Hospital Corps School, A School, Great Lakes, IL in August 1950. He graduated Field Medical Service School, Montford Point, Camp Lejeune, NC, August 1951.

⁶ A Company, 3rd Medical Battalion, 3rd Marine Brigade, Camp Pendleton, August 1951 to June 1952.

⁷ A Company, 1st Armored Amphibian Battalion, 1st Marine Division, Korea, May 1952 to January 1953.

for me it was a pretty good FMF assignment in a reasonable place.

Q: Well, one of the things that is a constant throughout your service is your time with the Marine Corps. I'm wondering if you could comment about the Marine character and their relationship with their Docs.

A: I can remember when I first got to the Armored Amphibs; and I was with them probably about three or four days. I used to take the usual ribbing being called "squid,"⁸ "pecker checker,"⁹ "chancre mechanic,"¹⁰ so forth and so on. This all changed when we finally got into a hell of an artillery barrage and had a few wounded. The next morning when we mustered, the "Gunny" said, "You don't call him squid anymore. His name is 'Doc.'" With all I've accomplished in my lifetime, that was my greatest day.

Q: I was quite curious about this duty as part of the nuclear bomb test, "Tumbler-Snapper."¹¹ How the heck did you get pulled into that?

⁸ Squid—slang for "Sailor"

⁹ Pecker Checker—slang for doctor or corpsman

¹⁰ Chancre Mechanic—slang for doctors of corpsman

¹¹ HMCS Monaco deployed to the Nevada desert as part of the Nuclear Bomb Test, "Tumbler-Snapper," 1 May 1952. Operation Tumbler-Snapper was a series of nuclear bomb detonations in the Nevada desert. The Tumbler phase was sponsored by the Atomic Energy Commission and consisted of three airdrops which were intended to help explain discrepancies in the actual and estimated blast shock wave damage noted on previous detonations, and to establish more accurately the optimum height of burst. The Snapper phase was sponsored by the

A: I was at Camp Pendleton when they took a platoon of us out of the medical company I was with, and we were assigned to a Marine unit that was going out to Reno. We were told anybody who wants to go can go, and those that don't want to go can back out. I looked at my friend and said, "Reno liberty. Let's go!" So, we went out there and we got to watch an A-bomb go off.

Q: What was your role as a Corpsman?

A: Nothing more than an observer, really.

Q: My goodness. You were front lines and got a chance to see that. How would you describe the experience?

A: Yes, I saw it go off and then we got a chance to move up and see some of the damage that was done. I thought it's a hell of a way to get yourself killed. There's nothing left of you.

Q: What were you wearing to view this test?

A: Plain uniforms, nothing special.

Q: Did you have goggles?

A: No.

Department of Defense (DoD) and consisted of one airdrop and four tower shots intended to test various new weapons developments. During the detonations several thousand military personnel took part in exercises, military maneuvers, and used as observers to prepare them operations on a nuclear battlefield. (source: <http://www.dtra.mil/>).

Q: And how far away were you from the test?

A: I'd say we were probably a couple miles out, and we had slit trenches. Just before detonation they told us to get down in our holes, "Don't come up and don't look until we give you the word." That's exactly what I did because my mother raised idiots, but not fools. When it went off we got to look at it. That mushroom was one hell of a site to see, and then to walk into it and see the damage it did. Just incredible.

Q: Did you hear anything during the blast?

A: Oh yes, one hell of a noise, and what was really unusual, and I kind of laughed about it later, a couple of Marines got up from the trench when they shouldn't have and were knocked flat on their butts from the air blast coming out. Just as they were getting up again they got the return blast of air coming in and it knocked them down on their faces. I just looked at them and said, "They told you not to get up stupid, but you're a Marine, what the hell do you know?"

Q: Was there any follow-up with you afterwards to see if there was any negative repercussions?

A: No, but I'm still getting mail from the Atomic Energy Commission telling me "not to worry" and that I didn't get enough radiation. I laugh about it because my Navy specialty for a while was X-rays. I got more radiation doing that than I did watching an A-bomb.

Q: After this time in Korea I see that you were briefly at the Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton.¹² Were you a patient or were you assigned there?

A: I was sent there with a patient when I got back from Korea. I didn't come back with a battle wound, but I came back with a hernia. Somebody looked at me and said, "Well, how the hell does a corpsman get a hernia?"

I replied, "You try humping .75mm ammo crates up the hill."

Q: What do you remember about Pendleton at the time?

A: When I was at Pendleton I had just made third class right after Fleet Marine Force School. I was assigned there and it was just going out in the field, usual Marine games—"bang, bang, you're dead," and "dig in, get up." But it was like an overgrown picnic. The liberty was good. You couldn't beat the liberty, I mean, Oceanside, Los Angeles,

¹² Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton, CA, June 1953. The Hospital was established in 1942 and known as "Naval Hospital Santa Margarita Ranch."

San Diego, Ocean Beach. I had great West Coast liberty until I was on my way to Korea where I made HM2.

Q: After this I see you were sent to the New York Naval Shipyard in Brooklyn.¹³

A: Right, that was a funny story because when I left Camp Pendleton, they sent me down to the Naval Receiving Station in San Diego. The WAVE¹⁴ officer there said, "Oh, you're Fleet Marine Force, I can send you back to the Third Marine Division," which had formed up prior to embarking for Okinawa.

I said, "No, you're not. I just got out of the First Marine Division; I know where the Third is going." Then I asked, "Isn't my sea duty up?"

She asked, "Where do you want to go?"

To which I answered, "Bayonne, New Jersey, Supply Depot."

¹³ HMCS was assigned to the New York Naval Shipyard from May 1959 to December 1960.

¹⁴ WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services) was a designation for women Sailors and Officers serving in the Navy in World War II. Women serving in non-nursing positions were typically referred to as WAVES. Although the designation was disestablished at the close of World War II, the designation WAVES or WAVE continued to be used in reference to Navy women until the early 1970s.

I waited around awhile and then finally got a set of orders. I was called down and she said, "I couldn't get you Bayonne, but is the Brooklyn Navy Yard okay?"

I said, "It will do."

Q: So were you assigned to the Navy Yard dispensary?

A: There was a dispensary in the Navy Yard, and our main task there was taking care of ship yard workers. We had a small Marine barracks there, and we ran an ambulance service from the yard to St. Albans Naval Hospital,¹⁵ and that was a good duty. I met several "Career Navy" friends, had some adventures. It was a good duty station for clinical experience.

Q: Did you actually drive the ambulance?

A: No, no. We had civilian drivers. We used to laugh about that because we'd use the ambulance to go get pizza and bring it back hot. The Naval Shipyard duty gave me my first taste of actually being a Navy corpsman in a small unit. I was with about 20 corpsmen, everybody had a job and everyone stood department watches. It prepared me to be a First Class Petty Officer.

¹⁵ U.S. Naval Hospital St. Albans, NY was established in 1945 and was in operation until 1974.

Q: You're about five years in now and I see that you end up over at the Independent Duty School at Portsmouth, VA. What was that all about?

A: I went to "B" School exactly one month after I got married¹⁶; that didn't please my wife very much because she stayed in Jersey and I went to Portsmouth. When I finished "B" School I totally expected to go aboard a ship. And I'll be damned if I didn't get sent back to the Marines. This time they sent me to the Second Marine Division at Camp Lejeune.¹⁷ After I did a little over a year there my wife was crying the blues about being there. I called Lieutenant Commander [Solomon] Pflag,¹⁸ who I had met at St. Albans, and I told him my problem. He was an MSC¹⁹ at the Bureau at the time. He said, "The best I can do for you is McGuire Air Force Base²⁰ in Jersey." My wife was happier than hell until I got the assignment and she found out I was on an Air Force base with Navy Transport Squadron (VR-6) and was going to be flying. I was out of country about three days a

¹⁶ HMCS Monaco married Jacqueline Avedisian on 29 May 1955; he attended B School (Independent Duty School), U.S. Naval Hospital Portsmouth, VA, from June to December 1955.

¹⁷ HMCS Monaco was attached to the 2nd Medical Battalion, 2nd Marine Division, Camp Lejeune, NC, January 1956 to May 1957.

¹⁸ LCDR (later CAPT) Solomon C. Pflag, MSC, USN (1920-2014). A native of New York, Pflag entered the Navy as a Hospital Corpsman in 1942. In 1944, Pflag was commissioned as a Hospital Corps Officer and later transferred to the Medical Service Corps in 1948. Pflag retired in 1975.

¹⁹ MSC (Medical Service Corps)

²⁰ Naval Air Transport Squadron, McGuire Air Force Base, New Jersey, May 1957 to April 1958

week. That was good duty. I was able to see a lot of Europe doing that tour.

Q: This was strictly transport duty?

A: This was a VR-6,²¹ yes. We would carry either cargo or passengers in the back. Often times we'd bring back the remains of people who'd died over there. We'd have them latched up in the cargo section in shipping boxes. We found out that was a great place to get a day's sleep if you want to sleep on a shipping box.

It was good duty because I got to see places I normally wouldn't have seen, and while there my wife went on a rampage again because I was always away. So I called the Bureau [of Medicine and Surgery] again and got a hold of, by that time it was Commander Pflag, and he told me that the only place he could send me was X-ray school up at St. Albans.²² So that's where I went and it taught me a good trade because after I retired I taught school during the day and took X-rays at night and on weekends. That did well because it ended up putting my kids through college and gave the world another attorney. But, I got a lot out of

²¹ Air Transport Squadron Six (VR-6) was established at Dinner Key, Florida on April 2, 1943. It's composition was 11 Martin Mariner seaplanes and one land based Beechcraft SNB-3C twin-engine aircraft. The squadron's mission was defined as "providing air transportation as necessary to meet the needs of the naval establishment." Later the squadron was assigned a complement of Douglas R5D planes. The squadron was disestablished in 1963.

²² X-Ray Technicians School, U.S. Naval Hospital St. Albans, NY, May 1958-May 1959

that. I not only learned a trade, I was able to go from St. Albans right back to the Brooklyn Navy Yard again.²³ But, after being at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, I ended up going to MAT school.²⁴

Q: Down in Portsmouth?

A: Yes, at Portsmouth. I then had the ambition of being an MSC officer then. From MAT school I figured I was going to go to some major vessel or a shore station, but they sent me to MineLant²⁵ up in Charleston, SC, and was assigned to the USS *Pandemus* (ARL-18).²⁶ I was on her for about two months; I had never sailed until came aboard.²⁷ I wasn't on for more than two weeks and I decided it was time to move around. I was aboard for about two months and received orders to a minesweeper, the *Pinnacle*.²⁸ That was excellent duty; and I enjoyed going to sea aboard a minesweeper. You found out if you were a sailor or not on one of those wooden corks. I had to laugh because I had to go down to Puerto Rico to pick it up. When I arrived there and located the ship, I went up the gang plank. I laugh when I think about it now;

²³ Brooklyn Navy Yard, May 1959-December 1960

²⁴ Navy Medical Administration School, U.S. Naval Hospital Portsmouth, VA, January 1961-August 1961

²⁵ MineLant (Mine Force Atlantic Fleet).

²⁶ *Pandemus* (ARL-18) was one of 39 Achelous-class landing craft repair ships built for the United States Navy during World War II and was in commission from 1945 to 1946 and from 1951 to 1968.

²⁷ HMCS Monaco served aboard USS *Pandemus* (ARL-18), MineLant, a landing craft repair ship, August 1961-October 1961.

²⁸ Monaco served aboard the minesweeper USS *Pinnacle* (MSO-462), October 1961-October 1962.

I put my sea bag down, did my salutes, and saluted the XO of the ship, and he turned around and said, "Have you been saved?"

And I thought to myself, "Oh my God, what have I gotten into?" The XO was a very religious man and he was out to convert everybody on that ship.

The ship's Medical Department was actually in shambles. The Corpsman I was to relieve suffered a breakdown and had wrecked the Sick Bay and crayoned the Health Records "Red." I spent about a good month on that duty just getting it all together again, reconstructing records and so forth.

When I finally went ashore I went to a hotel called the Miramar for a drink. I'm sitting at the end of the bar, looked up at the other end and there's my CO. He waves me over; he's buying drinks so I'm not arguing. When we returned to the ship we staggered up the gangway. The next morning the XO looked at me and said, "I see you're not watching your company?"

"Hell, I was with the CO."

But that was a good duty and I enjoyed it. My minesweeping station was sitting up on the potato locker,

and I'd sit up there and if a guy got too close to the serrated cables I'd throw a potato at him. Hell, I was the safety officer and I had to do something to warn him he was too close to a cutting cable.

Q: I'd never heard that before.

A: That's when minesweepers were made of wood.

Q: You described your next duty station your favorite. Why was that the case?

A: That was. I was on the *Pinnacle* when I made chief. I had just come back from TAD orders; I think they had put me on the *Sagacity*,²⁹ and we'd gone up to the North Atlantic to try out minesweeping gear up in the northern waters. I never saw so much ice on water in my life. When I got back, the XO told me, "I've got something for you." I thought, "Oh my God, what are you going to do to me now?" He handed me a letter which was a notice from BUPERS that I'd made HMC. Shortly thereafter I got transferred to the *Furse*.³⁰ She was only three piers up from us. I walked up to the *Furse* and the minesweeper. I looked up and thought the *Furse* was a damned battleship when compared to the *Pinnacle*; that's how big she was to me. The *Furse* was a

²⁹ USS *Sagacity* (AM-469) was an Agile-class minesweeper in operation from 1955 to 1970.

³⁰ USS *Furse* (DD-882) was a *Gearing*-class destroyer in operation from 1945 to 1972. Monaco served aboard her from October 1962 to July 1964. He would describe it as the best duty station in his career.

great ship with outstanding officers and enlisted personnel. To this day I have not missed any reunions of that ship.

CDR Russell Stevens was the CO and LCDR Don Pauly,³¹ was the XO when I reported aboard the *Furse*. Pauly later became the CO when the ship was "FRAM'ed"³² in Philadelphia. Over the years "Don" and I have become close friends. He, his wife Marge, my late wife and I have traveled and done things together. That duty not only gave me a good officer, but a life-long friend.

Q: Can you talk about the day-to-day job of an IDC aboard that ship?

A: Well, sick call was at 0800 in the morning, and usually I'd do a sanitation inspection. I'd walk through the galley, walk the decks and make sure things were clean, check my first aid boxes, and after you get that all done there's really very little for you to do. What had happened, the chiefs aboard were standing watches and I asked, "Listen, how about letting me stand the JOD³³ watch when we're in

³¹ LCDR (later Captain) Don Pauly was the XO of the *Furse* during Cuban quarantine ops, 1962 to 1963.

³² FRAM (Fleet Rehabilitation and Modernization) program. The FRAM program was established during a time when the Eisenhower Administration was seeking major cuts in Defense spending. Instead of commissioning newer ships the Navy tried to extend the lives of World War II ships, especially destroyers.

³³ JOD (Junior Officer on Duty).

port? I can stand quarterdeck like you can." And I got to do that and the guys looked at me and said, "You're the only HMC who's ever asked to stand the quarterdeck watch."

I said, "Well, I live here."

I got to know the ship pretty well. I even got up on the bridge several times. Pauly was the XO then and he let me take the helm, and I thought, boy this is fun, and rode that one down to Cuba to the Cuban Blockade. And while in Cuba we were putting into Gitmo about every three days. One time while underway one of the chiefs convinced me that we should make some "kickaboo juice." I got some alcohol out and we exchanged the alcohol in the compass, made some juice and went down to the CPO Mess to drink it. After about two cups I said, "That's it. Doc's going to bed." A little after that, the Chief comes down and shook me out of bed and said, "Doc, Chief Koblenz just fell." I went up there and he had his ankle twisted completely around, got that all settled up and went up and told the XO that we have a BTC³⁴ that needs his ankle taken care of now, he said, "Well, we'll get permission to head in." We entered Gitmo and took Koblenz to the naval hospital. You know the

³⁴ BTC (Chief Boiler Technician)

Information Board telling you who the CO, XO, Chief of Surgery are? I checked and the CO is a guy named Captain Herbie Makowitz.³⁵ But down the list further, about four or five more lines, there's Captain Herbert Makowitz listed again as Chief of Orthopedics. We are in the emergency room, I've got Koblenz on the litter, and Captain Makowitz, who I knew from Camp Lejeune came in and he looks at him. I swear, Captain Markowitz looked like something out of M*A*S*H³⁶ wearing one of those robes and all. He looked at Koblenz and said, "Chief, this man is drunk."

"No, sir."

"Martin, the man is drunk."

"No, sir. He's sober. He had a sixth of a grain of morphine."

And he came back with, "I know drunk when I see drunk."

I, responded, "Yes, sir, I'm sure you do. I drove your car off to the Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune steps in 1950." Because he had tried to bring it up the steps and into the hospital. It's amazing the way things go around.

³⁵ CAPT Herbert Makowitz, MC, USN (1911-1995) an orthopedic surgeon and a former WWII POW.

³⁶ M*A*S*H (1970)—satirical film directed by Robert Altman about Army medical unit set during the Korean War but really a commentary about the Vietnam War. Later inspired long-running TV series of the same name (1972-1983).

Q: Yes, it really is. And you know, you're aboard that ship during some very interesting times in this country's history, certainly during the Cuban Missile Crisis.³⁷ What do you remember about that time?

A: Yes, we had started on a Saturday night, I remember that one. You may be a little young to remember "Have Gun Will Travel."

Q: I know the program. Richard Boone as Paladin, right? ³⁸

A: Right. My wife and I had just had one of our normal marriage knock down drag outs and we were watching that and the phone rang, and I was told, "Chief, get back to the ship. We're getting underway."

I said, "Okay." So I told my wife and I'd swear you would think I was the guy that caused the war because she said, "You did this on purpose. You don't have to go now."

I said, "Yes, I have to go back, really." I went back to the ship and we got underway by midnight. After we cleared the harbor they told us where we were going. While we were in Cuban waters we were way out there and we were waiting for the Russian freighters to come in so we could

³⁷ Cuban Missile Crisis—a 13 day confrontation (October 14-28, 1962) between the U.S. and the Soviet Union over the location of ballistic missiles in Cuba and one of the "hottest" world events of the Cold War.

³⁸ Richard Boone (1917-1918) was an actor best known for starring in the TV Western, *Have Gun - Will Travel* (1957-1963).

check them out. Once while we were there we were approached by aircraft, when they reached a certain distance, if necessary, we could open fire to protect ourselves. I remember standing up on the wing of the bridge next to Gary Sutton, who was a QM3, and they were calling off the range distance numbers on this one plane approaching, and I remember he turned around and he asked, "Chief, are we going to war?"

And I said, "We might." And that turned out to be alright; nothing happened there. They were getting Marines ready, and the skipper turned around and he said, "Getting homesick, chief?"

I said, "No, I've done all the tour of duty I want to do with the Marines." That was a good cruise. We did what we had to do. And what got me is nobody regretted us doing it. It was just a situation and it was going to be solved, and no pussy-footing around like they're doing today. They don't know what the hell they're even doing.

When we finished that tour we stopped at Key West. This was the first decent liberty port the guys had seen, probably, in two months. And somehow or other everybody got

over to the Brown Derby,³⁹ and that turned into a real sailor's drunken brawl. I mean, our ship took over that place that night and we had a drinking party like nobody'd ever seen. Some idiots from Eastern Europe took some pictures of us and they ended up in a European magazine with the caption about American sailors celebrating after returning from Cuba, or whatever the hell it was. But I know Don Pauly said it took him three months of writing letters to straighten that mess out. BUPERS kept asking him what was going on and he had to respond back and forth. That was probably why he never made admiral. But it was one hell of a party.

That was a great Navy back then. We didn't have women on ships. We didn't have to worry about anybody but ourselves. The Navy at that time was still great and the destroyer Navy was still a Dungaree Navy. You lived like sailors, and there was a camaraderie; everybody took care of everybody. Now, you talk to some of these kids and they don't even know who the kid in the next compartment is.

Q: Yes, I think that reflects upon society itself, too.

³⁹ The Brown Derby was located on the southeast corner of Whitehead and Southard Streets in Key West, FL. It was known as a "Sailor's Bar" and typically frequented by Navy personnel station at and passing through the Keys. The bar is now known as "The Green Parrot."

You were attached to the *Furse* when President Kennedy was assassinated. Do you recall that day?

A: Yes, I recall that because we were at sea. Suddenly the bosun's pipe went off, and the Captain got on the intercom and said that President Kennedy had been shot. Everybody looked at each other wondering what the hell was going on. And then it couldn't have been ten minutes later he came on and he said that news had come through that the President was dead and he had been assassinated and that we were going to return to Charleston. We were on our way back from Cuba; we had just undergone an ORI⁴⁰ inspection. But it was a sad day. I had never been a Democrat, but I damn sure never want to see a president assassinated.

Q: Where did you go after this?

A: I ended up at 90 Church Street,⁴¹ which is exactly where I enlisted in the Navy.

Q: Full circle.

A: Yes, full circle, and I was up there in the Third Naval District. I also had to do the reserve training center

⁴⁰ ORI (Operational Readiness Inspection).

⁴¹ Art deco building in Southeast New York City sometimes referred to as "Play House 90" (after the TV series) that housed the Navy enlistment office for the 3rd Naval District as well as several Federal and city government offices. Monaco served at District Medical Office, HQ, 3rd Naval District, NYC, July 1964 to March 1966.

medical department inspections. I realized that you don't go north in New York state in the winter, you do that in the summer and the spring. I was assigned to Decedent Affairs and found that there are some people out there that are just plain dirt. I remember one young man's remains were sent up from New Orleans; I remember that one well, and the undertaker had submitted a bill to the parents, and the parents brought it up to 90 Church Street. I scanned the statement and noted the amount was \$7,000 and said to myself "This can't be for real." I looked at the parents and told them: "This can't be right" and that I would look into it. At that time the burial allowance was \$350 with a \$150 allowance to purchase a grave site for the remains. I'm not sure if there was an allowance to purchase a gravestone. I do recall advising that the VA would provide a gravestone. I asked them to leave the papers with me and I would see what I could do. At 90 Church Street our Medical Department was on the 13th floor; the IRS was on the 11th floor. I took it down to the IRS office and saw an agent down there and he said, "Oh, we'll take care of this." And within a week I received a new bill-"no charge." So I guess they went and did a number on him and explained the facts of life to him. Anyway, the family didn't get screwed on that one.

On another occasion I was sitting at my desk and a woman came in and asked, "Are you Chief Monaco?"

I responded, "Yes, Ma'am, how can I assist you?"

She said, "Well, I'd like to have my husband buried at sea." Now I start praying thinking, I hope you have him cremated. I said, "Can you tell me where the remains are?"

She reached down and picked a tin can up out of her shopping bag and puts it on my desk. She responded, "Here he is. He was up in the attic." The guy had been dead for about ten years. In these cases we would save a couple of cans of ashes and then we'd bring them out to one of the reserve ships that was in and they'd take them out and do the burial at sea, take photos of the ceremony and we'd distribute them to the next of kin. That could be comical at times, at other times it was sad duty when you would meet the mother who lost a young son.

Q: Did you ever have CACO detail?

A: No, fortunately I never had to go on CACO because the Reserve Training Center nearest would take care of that. And if it was a Marine, the Marine Reserve Training Center would do that, so I didn't have to get involved. I just had to make sure that the bills were paid. People would come by

and start telling you about their son or their husband and it gets to you.

While I was at 90 Church Street I had the most miserable Medical Service Corps officer of my life. In fact, you guys probably have a record down on him. The story was that he had been at Bethesda as the Administrative Officer, and they "deep sixed" him out of there and to get rid of him and sent him up to 90 Church. Actually the CO of St. Albans was the District Medical Officer, and CAPT Charlie Ferber, MSC, USN was there and he was the administrative officer. What a man. He could make Christ miserable, and he made me so miserable. One day I found that he was listening in on my phone calls. This angered me to the point that he and I had it out. I went to his office, closed the door and we had a few words. He then asked, "Well, how are we going to solve this?"

My answer was, "You're going to get me transferred to St. Albans." And that happened within 48 hours.

Q: Wow, he sounds like a real peach.

A: He was.

Q: I'll have to look around and see what we might have on him.

A: I'm sure he's long dead. He was a Mustang and he got his commission in World War II. I used to laugh that he'd come in in the morning and he'd pull out the officer's register and start reading and going through the listing, and one day I asked him, "Captain, what are you doing?"

He replied, "I want to see how I stand about making rear admiral." He would never make rear admiral Medical Service Corps; we didn't have any then anyway.⁴²

Q: No, not until the 1980s.

A: And he thought he was going to be up on top for that. We were talking one day and I guess I got off on the wrong foot, I said, "You know, Captain, when you got your commission, all you had to do was piss in a bottle." He kind of looked at me. But we didn't like each other from the first moment we met.

Larry Bysidny was there and was a very good man and officer; he was a good man. He and I were in competition with each other going to college, seeing who the hell would get the best marks. But that was good.

Q: So St. Albans, up in Long Island, what was the state of medicine at the hospital back then?

⁴² CAPT Lewis E. Angelo was selected as the first Navy Medical Service Corps flag officer in 1982. He was frocked to Commodore, and in July 1982 assumed the position of Director of the Medical Service Corps. Rear Admiral Angelo served until 1987.

A: Well, when I transferred to St. Albans I was assigned to the personnel office for a while assigning enlisted personnel. I worked for a LCDR McDonough; he was an old Mustang, had his daughter stationed there; she was a Navy nurse. Man, she was hell on wheels—a young ensign and driving everybody crazy. Every once in a while, he'd turn around and say, "If anybody sees my daughter doing the wrong thing, please let me know." But he was a good man.

I had the personnel office; I was working there as the detail chief of the hospital, and then I got tired of doing that and asked them if they'd send me to Vietnam and they did.

Q: Of course, things are really picking up beginning in 1966. What was your knowledge of the conflict at that point?

A: I think my highlight with the Marines was probably at Vietnam, where I had the opportunity to bring a group up to Dong Ha and, actually from plain dirt, set up a medical unit with D Company 3rd Marine Division Forward.⁴³

⁴³ Monaco served with the D Company, 3rd Medical Battalion, 3rd Marine Division FWD (Vietnam), September 1966-August 1967

At that point I really didn't know anything about how the hell it was going. I had an idea that the war was to be like I'd seen in Korea, but I didn't know what the hell was going on over there. When I did get there I took one look around and my honest thought was, this is a meat grinder; we're not going to make it, because you didn't know who the hell your friend was; you didn't know where you were going to be from day to day as far as what was going on. We'd go like two weeks with absolutely nothing at all, and then suddenly, the crap would hit the fan and we'd receive more damn casualties than we knew what to do with.

Q: So you're with the D Company up at Third Medical Battalion, the DMZ area, is that correct?

A: Yes, we were right below it. And we would get the casualties that were coming from Chu Lai, Khe Sanh, all along in that place. When I first checked into the Nam, I went into Phu Bai, and down there I was told they were forming up a company-"Delta Medical," and it was going up north. They didn't tell me DMZ, the bastards. They told me I was going to Dong Ha; I didn't know where Dong Ha was. They didn't tell me it was a mile behind the line. I said, "Okay, where's the company at?"

And they looked at me and they said, "Well, right now you're the company." They started assigning corpsmen. When we had about 20 corpsmen and a couple of Marines, we went up to Dong Ha. We had absolutely nothing. They assigned us an old French Foreign Legion outpost building and we turned that into a medical unit. I remember meeting LCDR Newt McCollough, who was the first CO of Delta Med Company at Dong Ha. He was funny as hell. Do they still have the Berry Plan?⁴⁴

Q: No, they don't. It went away once with the draft.

A: Well, anyway, he had just finished his orthopedic residency on the Berry Plan and he received a set of orders to Vietnam. He shows up there and I had a couple of the kids with me and we're digging in, putting in some slit trenches and ditching the tents we were in. He came up and asked, "Are you Chief Monaco?"

I said, "Yes, Sir"

He said, "I'm Doctor McCollough your Commanding Officer."

⁴⁴ Berry Plan—Armed Forces Physicians Appointment and Residency Consideration Program (or Berry Plan). Conceived in 1954 by Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs Frank B. Berry (1892-1976), the Berry Plan allowed for physicians to be deferred from military service while pursuing training in medical specialties that they would use in their two-year military commitment. The adoption of the all-volunteer military force in 1973 marked the end of the Berry Plan.

I responded, "Well, welcome aboard."

His next words were, "Chief, I've only been in the Navy about a month."

I thought, "Oh my God!" With that he next tells me, "I don't know anything about the Navy."

To which I responded, "Well, you don't have to. I'll take care of that for you."

Q: Like a good chief, that's right.

A: Once, when Dr. McCollough and I were talking he said, "Chief, I'll do anything you tell me to do, and I'll sign anything you give me to sign, but please don't let them send me to jail." And with that I cracked up laughing. I said, "Commander, believe me, this is not a Sergeant Bilko."⁴⁵

After we had the company up and going we slept under canvas for a while. The Seabees came up and they built these hooches with the corrugated iron roofs and wooden decks four feet off the ground. Phu Bai sent up a Medical Service Corps officer which I needed like a hole in the head. We immediately came into a conflict because I had

⁴⁵ Sergeant Bilko—comedic character portrayed by Phil Silvers on TV in the 1950s. Bilko was an Army sergeant who rarely followed protocol to get things done or to get things for his unit.

known him in the States when he was HM1 and my feeling was you are too stupid to make chief so they made you an MSC. This was Lt (j.g.) Kenneth Lashley, MSC, USN. He and I just never hit it off right so when I finished my tour up there I was sent down to Phu Bai. From Phu Bai to Da Nang, then Okinawa for the last stop prior to rotation back to CONUS. I was sent back to the States. While I was with Delta we probably took part in about 12 different operations running anywhere from a couple of days each to maybe two weeks. I think probably a good dozen of them anyway, that I can remember-Cimarron; Operation Prairie 1,2,3,4; Beacon Hill, Ardmore; Hickory 1 and 2; Buffalo and Crockett for a total of twelve combat operations in twelve months.

Q: How long did these operations typically last?

A: Like I say, it could be a two-day operation or it could be a two-week operation, depending on how long it was taking them to figure out what kind of a body count they wanted to lie about, or they figured we'd been hit enough or did we accomplish what we had to accomplish?

Q: Well, you guys definitely took a lot of fire.

A: At Dong Ha we were within artillery rocket and mortar range. At Dong Ha they threw some artillery at us. In fact,

I got winged twice within one week up there, and that's where I got my Bronze Star.

Q: Yes, I got the citation here. So, this is May of 1967?

A: Yes. Like I said, I was really close with and respected LCDR's Jay Cox and Newt McCollough. Dr. Cox was Dr. McCollough's relief as Commanding Officer. They, too, did not have much respect for my friend Lashley. There are some people that I'm surprised got to come home.

Q: I'm wondering if you can talk about May 1967, the action that would earn you the Bronze Star? What do you recall about that time up in Dong Ha?

A: What had happened was it was night time and we started taking some heavy incoming, tried to get all our casualties down underground because as I told you, we had these hooches that the Seabees had built, and we got our casualties underground, and I was in one of the slit trenches and saw that probably 50 or 75 yards away, an Army communications bunker took a direct hit. I heard somebody yelling. So I got out of my hole and went up to see what was going on and found. There were three guys in there—one of them was dead. The other two we took care of gave them immediate first aid to stop the bleeding and made it back

down to the area, got hold of a couple of guys and went back with some stretchers and took them to bring them back down to the hospital bunker. We took care of casualties all that night. I mean, we took some incoming fire that night I couldn't believe it. When the sun came up, I looked around, the Seabees had been nice enough to put up one of those rubber water tanks; they blew that thing away; they blew our generator away; they blew one of the wards away. Thank God we had the guys out of there and underground. That was one hell of a night, I'll tell you.

I think LT (j.g.) Franklin was there to relieve Lashley. I think he got hit that night when he was attempting to get some of the wounded up to the airstrip, which was just on the other side of our compound. Let me put it this way, we were awash in blood that night. It was a hell of a night.

Q: Certainly you had a lot of the younger corpsmen serving under you.

A: I had some good corpsmen. I had really good corpsmen.

Q: What were you telling them after you get them through...

A: I would go anywhere with those kids again. They were good. I remember when I first spoke to you I asked to talk to you about Mike Judd.⁴⁶

Q: I was just about to ask you about him.

A: Mike Judd was at RECON, and I knew some of the corpsmen that had gone to corps school with him. He used to be a pretty regular visitor over to see those guys and he always worked his ass off, every time he came there he worked, and I got to know him pretty well. And I had told Ken Lashley that the kids used to get on these damn helicopters. I think the thing was they knew that sometimes they'd get a ride out to the hospital ship. I told him, "Don't let anybody out of here on a chopper." I said, "You're going to need every man you've got and you need them right up here." And when I got back from Da Nang, the kids told me that Mike had been killed. I said, "What the hell happened up here?"

⁴⁶ On 30 June 1967, HM3 Michael Barry Judd was aboard a CH-46A Sea Knight helicopter that was attempting to insert a U.S. Marine Corps reconnaissance team into hostile territory in Thua Thien-Hue Province, Vietnam. As the helicopter approached the landing zone, it was struck by enemy fire from the surrounding tree line, causing the aircraft to catch fire. The aircraft crashed landed. Although most of the reconnaissance team survived, Judd and four other crew members of the team, died in the crash. In 2012, joint U.S./S.R.V. recovery teams began excavating the crash site and recovered human remains and aircraft wreckage from the CH-46A helicopter that Judd was aboard. Scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) used forensic identification tools and circumstantial evidence, including dental comparisons in the identification of Judd remains. Judd's remains were interred at Arlington National Cemetery on July 13, 2013.

And they said, "Well, he belonged to RECON, and he went back to RECON. He got a chopper out of here and his chopper got knocked out of the air and there were five of them in it." It wasn't until 2013 that I had enough gonads to go back to Vietnam and went to JPAC,⁴⁷ I think they call it, up there in Hanoi, met a Marine major, and I asked if they had found his remains because I never knew what had happened to his remains. I didn't know whether-which they'll never admit they do-some of those things went down and if they couldn't get to them they napalmed them to destroy them so the enemy wouldn't get them. And I didn't know if they had done that because there were no remains to recover. And this guy told me, "I can't tell you what's up, Chief, because you're not next to kin, but you'll get an email when you get home." And then when I got home, I get an email and it was some guy in Hawaii telling me that they had Mike's remains, and he was going to be shipped home for burial in Arlington. I asked at that time could I get two weeks active duty at no cost to the government and I'd pay my own car far out to Hawaii, and they said, no, they already had a CACO officer. And when she got back with the remains she contacted me, and my son and I went to

⁴⁷ Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC)

Arlington for Mike's funeral. I was in uniform, and that was funny because when I went outside she was in uniform. I threw her a highball and she looked at me and she said, "Chief, with all you've got on the left side of your uniform I ought to be saluting you. We went out to Arlington and she told me, "You carry the remains and I'll take the flag up to where they're going to have the ceremony." We did that, and I asked first, "How much do you have in remains here?" Because it wasn't much bigger than a toy box, a small one at that.

And she said, "One tooth." That's all they had. And they had dug that area a few times and had not come up with anything, but I guess this time they got it caught in a sieve and they were able to come up with something. But the ironic thing about that, Mike is buried about 25 feet from my wife. And when my time comes I'll be buried there also, and maybe I'll be able to keep an eye on him this time.

Q: What is your experience at Da Nang? This was a fairly new facility when you were there.

A: I used to go down to Da Nang to steal.

Q: Like medical supplies?

A: Yes, I would try to get medical supplies or whatever the hell else I could get and bring it back up to Dong Ha, and that's where I was when that stuff with Mike happened. People may not believe this, but it was tough getting medical supplies up there, it really was. You used to have to beg, borrow and steal about 90% of what we got from the Army at that time. And I'd periodically make a trip down to Da Nang and see what I could steal, borrow or whatever just to get stuff. The biggest prize there were these metal-like suitcases, and we were getting those to put stuff in because occasionally from Delta MED we would send out supplies to some of the forward units, and we'd load it in that and get it on the chopper, and the chopper would bring them out to wherever they had to go.

In Da Nang, I got down there a couple of times and made a visit down to an orphanage there once and took care of some people that were down there, some orphans and nuns, but that was really a very small part of it. My life was up at Dong Ha.

Q: Why were you down there? Was it part of a humanitarian effort? Maybe a MEDCAP or something?

A: We would go out periodically; we'd take a couple of corpsmen and an ambulance and we'd go out and hold a

"Mickey Mouse" and give people band-aids, toothpaste, toothbrushes, and propaganda pamphlets from the south Vietnamese government. The word we had was we were not to question wounds. If somebody was wounded, don't question them because that meant they're probably VC and if you question them you're going to have a problem on your hands. That was what we did, we took care of them. That was about the type of work we'd do; go out there and take care of that stuff.

Q: You said these efforts were called "Mickey Mouses?"

A: We used to call them "Mickey Mouses"—a couple corpsmen, a couple of Marines, then we each had a weapon, but we rarely ever needed them because when we were out there they didn't screw around with us. On occasion you'd hear a round go off and everybody'd hit the deck. We did have one kid get hit one time, but nothing really earth-shaking.

Some of the kids actually lived in the villages. They were with a Marine squad and they'd live in the villages, and my feeling used to be "better you than me." I don't want any part of that.

Q: Seems a little risky to me.

A: Yes, it was because they never knew what the hell was going to happen. But up at Dong Ha we took, like I say, most of the casualties out at Con Thien, Gau Lie of Quang Tri Province. I tell you, I went there in 2013, and to be very honest, I looked around and I saw the way the people are living today out in the boonies, they're still living the same. When I look at Saigon—now Ho Chi Min City—Hue City or Hanoi—I think we should have never come here. These people are doing better now since we left than they were when we were here. They seem to have an economy that's going. I took an interest in school children because after I retired I went into teaching. The kids seem happy and to be honest, hearing kids laughing, seeing them playing on the playground, I took a look and said, "It's over. It is over." And I came back feeling a hell of a lot better.

Q: Where did you go after your tour of duty?

A: I went right back to 90 Church Street. Thank God, Charlie Ferber was gone.

Q: Still hadn't made admiral?

A: Still hadn't made admiral. He retired after I left. He was a patient at U.S. Naval Hospital St. Albans. You cannot believe this man. He was whacked. Going out to St. Alban's

one day, he said, "Chief, you want to bring my teeth out there?"

Stunned, I said, "What?"

He said, "Yes, my teeth. They have to be adjusted. Do you want to bring them to the dental clinic for me?"

I said, "Yes, but don't you think it'd be better if you brought them so they could fit them?"

He said, "Well, if they don't fit I'll send them back." He wasn't there when I got back. Admiral Foley was there when I got back. He was a line officer and I got to know him pretty well. He was a good man. He really knew what was going on. Even being an admiral this guy would make the rounds in the offices and he'd talk to the people that were working. He didn't just hide in his office. He came around and saw the people. The first time I was there Redford "Rosie" Mason⁴⁸ was the admiral. Redfield Mason, now there's a man with guts. During World War II, he had been with the people in Hawaii that broke the Japanese Imperial Code. He had a mind like you couldn't believe. I never saw a man with such a sharp mind. I don't know if you remember

⁴⁸ Admirals Francis Foley and Redford "Rosie" Mason (1904-1995) were assigned as Commandants of the Third Naval District. Monaco called them true "gentlemen and officers" and they knew their personnel and demonstrated true concern for the welfare of the "Play House 90" staff. Each assisted Monaco in scheduling "duty days" for weekends so that he could attend classes week nights. Mason later achieved fame for winning on the CBS game show "\$64,000 Question."

the TV show *\$64,000 Question*. He went on that show and he won the \$64,000 on Greek mythology, and he knew absolutely nothing about Greek mythology, but he read every book he could for a month. He developed cancer of the throat, and he went to St. Alban's and they had to do a laryngectomy on him. When the man came out of anesthesia he motioned for a paper and pencil, and his first words were, "When do I start therapy?" He had a set. He was a good man.

And like I said, he and Admiral Foley were cut from a rock where they took care of their people and they knew their people. Both of them knew I was going to school when I was there, and they gave me permission to set up my schedule for school and they would help me work around it to see that I'd be able to make classes. I stood a lot of weekend duties; I didn't get out of standing watches because I would have to stand the Chief of the Day watch for the naval district, but I had my week days off to go to class.

Q: So they kind of looked out for you?

A: Yes. I mean when you look at them these were guys who cared. I don't know if this sounds right, but I look at these guys and they're wearing their 22 rows of ribbons going over their shoulder and down their back, and I know

that 90% of them were "me-too" ribbons. I passed through the area so give me the ribbon. I know what Mason did during World War II. I know Foley had been the flight deck officer on the *Hornet* when she went down.⁴⁹ You can talk to these guys and they have a respect for the enlisted personnel because they knew what the hell was going on and they knew that. They took care of the people in that building and the people took care of them too.

Q: You mentioned that a World War II corpsman by the name of Joe Marquez⁵⁰ was also was an influence on you.

A: That's Jose Eleuterio Marquez. Marquez had been hit at Peleliu, and he taught me a lot about living in the FMF and how to be a corpsman. The main thing he told me was, "Don't take a chance if you don't think you're going to make it." And Joe got hit on Peleliu as I said, and it was an interesting story with him. Joe, obviously Hispanic, and word was out that he'd been put up for the Congressional, but in those days they weren't giving any Medals of Honor to "wet backs," and so he ended up with the Navy Cross. I

⁴⁹ Admiral Francis Foley (1910-1999) was a naval aviator who served as the air operations officer aboard the carrier USS *Hornet* when it was sunk in the Battle of Santa Cruz in the Solomons in October 1942. Later in the war, he held staff positions on other carriers.

⁵⁰ HM2 Eleuterio "Joe" Marquez (1925-2015), World War II Hospital Corpsmen awarded the Navy Cross for heroism in the Battle of Peleliu (Palau) in September 1944. Marquez passed away on 28 August 2015.

know Joe, and his wife Ann. We kept in touch and spoke to each other occasionally.

When he was on Peleliu he had been hit and he couldn't move because he'd been hit in both legs; he was crawling around taking care of the casualties. And after dark, somebody crawled up to him and said, "Can I help you?"

And he said, "Yes, if you're a corpsman you sure as hell can help me." The guy worked all night taking care of casualties with Joe doing what he could without his legs. The next morning the guy was gone. Joe could not find him, nobody knew anything about him. The guy just disappeared. To this day Joe swears that an angel came down from God helped him. Joe is now in his 90s, and he says, "Everyday I'm getting closer to seeing that angel again."

Q: That's incredible. I've actually heard of his name, but I didn't know he was still living.

A: He better be because nobody sent me word that he passed away. Joe Marquez lives in Oceanside, California outside Pendleton. He used to break my chops wanting to know when the hell I was going to go out there for the First Marine Division program that they have when they celebrate the formation of the Division. But he was a fabulous guy-tall

and thin. He looked like a Latin lover; I swear-tall, thin, thin mustache, and black hair. I used to kid around and tell him, "You could go play the part of Zorro."

Q: So you finally retire in 1970, shift course and end up in the teaching profession.

A: Yes. I had no desire to get out of the Navy, I really didn't. My wife didn't like Navy life, and I made the promise before I went to Da Nang that I would get out when I came back. I kept my promise, I got out. And she was right in the long run because I retired at an age where I could finish up, get into a new profession, and work in it long enough that I got a pension out of them too.

Q: Outstanding. Well, as you look back, is there anything you would want to change about your career?

A: Nope, not at all. I think my going in the Navy was the greatest thing in the world. They took a stupid kid, fed him, clothed him, taught him a trade, treated him well, helped him get an education, and I wrote it in that letter to you, as Lou Gehrig said, I was the "luckiest man in the world."

Q: So what legacies are you most proud of?

A: I think the proudest thing I've done is probably working at Delta MED up in Dong Ha. This was a duty that I actually got involved in and really saved lives. Not that I was anything special, but it was helping somebody that needed help.

Q: If you could go back and meet 17-year old Martin Monaco, what would you tell yourself?

A: I'd say do it again because when I was up at 90 Church, some woman came in with her son and she said she was trying to talk to him about getting into the Navy. She asked me what I could do for her son.

I said, "Not a damn thing that he can't do for himself. If he wants to come in and work at it, he'll make it. If he wants to be a bum, he can work at that too, but he won't last long."

But to me, I think the greatest thing the Navy taught me was discipline, and along with the discipline, once you start something you do your damn best, even if your best doesn't succeed, at least you can say you did your best.

Q: Well, Senior, I really appreciate your time today. I really enjoyed speaking with you today.

A: My pleasure.