

**Oral Memoirs**  
**Of**  
**Gordon Pierce and Trina Pierce Cothrin**

An Interview Conducted by

Roger Jordan Sims

March 12, 2014

Community Veterans History Project

Lone Sailor Memorial Project

*University of Central Florida RICHES of Central Florida*

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## **Interview Histories**

Interviewer: Roger Jordan Sims

Transcriber: Roger Jordan Sims

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the RICHES of Central Florida Department, University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida.

## **Project Detail**

The Community Veterans History Project, a RICHES of Central Florida Project at the University of Central Florida, includes interviews with Central Florida veterans from all branches of the United States military. Beginning in 2010, the UCF Community Veterans History Project is collecting, preserving, and making accessible to the public the experiences of Central Florida's veterans so that future generations will better understand the realities of conflict. It is a collaborative endeavor supported by multiple departments and offices at UCF. The histories, which are collected by students and faculty, are archived and made digitally available through the UCF library. The UCF Community Veterans History Project will also contribute selected veterans' histories to the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress.

## **Legal Status**

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Gordon Pierce and Trina Pierce Cothrin is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on March 12, 2014.

## **Abstract**

Oral history interview of Gordon Pierce and Trina Pierce Cothrin, who both served in the U.S. Navy. Pierce was born in Buffalo, New York, on September 16, 1930. He enlisted in the Navy in 1948 and served until September of 1977, during the Cold War era and the Vietnam War. During his service, Pierce was station on the USS *Wasp*, the USS *Coral Sea*, the USS *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, and the USS *John F. Kennedy*. He achieved the rank of Master Chief Petty Officer and earned a Navy Commendation Medal and a Navy Achievement Medal.

Pierce's daughter, Trina Pierce Cothrin, was born in Jacksonville, Florida, on October 13, 1958. Cothrin enlisted in the Navy in October of 1979 and served until October of 1982, when her son was born. She was then in the U.S. Naval Reserve until 1993, when she joined the U.S. Army. She left the military in 2009, after serving in Operation Enduring Freedom during the War in Afghanistan. Throughout her service, Cothrin was station at Naval Air Station (NAS) Miramar in California, Naval Air Station (NAS) Jacksonville, U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) in Qatar, and MacDill Air Force Base (AFB) in Tampa. She ultimately achieved the rank of Chief Yeoman.

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This oral history interview was conducted by Roger Jordan Sims on March 12, 2014. Interview topics include enlistment, boot camp, Naval Training Center (NTC) Orlando, the Vietnam War, Operation Enduring Freedom and the War in Afghanistan, life after leaving the Navy, how Central Florida has changed over time, the legacy of NTC Orlando, and the Lone Sailor Memorial Project.

## **Gordon Pierce and Trina Pierce Cothrin**

Oral History Memoir  
Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Roger Jordan Sims  
March 12, 2014  
Orlando, Florida

0:00:00

### **Introduction**

**Sims** Okay. Today is March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2014. I am interviewing Gordon Pierce and Ms. Trina [Pierce] Cothrin, uh, who served in the United States Navy. Uh, Mr. Pierce was an aviation metalsmith. Uh, Ms. Cothrin was an aviation maintenance administrator and yeoman. My name is [Roger] Jordan Sims. We are interviewing Mr., and, uh – Mr. Pierce and Ms. Cothrin as part of the UCF [University of Central Florida] Community Veterans History Project and as research for the creation of the Lone Sailor Memorial Project. We are recording this interview at the [Central Florida] Research Parkway in Orlando, Florida. Uh, Mr. Pierce, Ms. Cothrin, will you please start by telling us when and where you were born?

0:01:48

### **Background**

**Pierce** I was born in Buffalo, New York, in 1930.

**Cothrin** And I was born in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1958.

**Sims** What did your parents do for a living?

**Pierce** My parents worked for the State of New York. My father was, uh, in charge of the warehouse for all the supplies for a mental hospital, and my mother was a nurse.

**Cothrin** And my father was, uh, a Master Chief Petty Officer in the United States Navy – Navy, and my mother was a full-time, uh, mom.

**Sims** Uh, do you have any brothers and sisters?

**Cothrin** I do. I have, uh, three brothers and one sister. Uh, my oldest brother, uh, Tommy Foreman – he was actually stationed at, uh, McCoy Air Force Base, Uh, when it was an Air Force base, and then, uh, my younger brother Bruce [Pierce] joined the Navy. He and I joined the Navy together on the same day. Uh, He was in boot camp before I did, but we, uh – our paths crossed while we were in boot – boot camp together, and then later, Uh, when I was stationed in San Diego[, California], he came to San Diego for school. Uh, and then, Uh, when my husband and I were stationed in Pensacola, he also was subsequently stationed

in Pensa – Pensacola. Then I have a sister named Tina [Pierce] and a younger brother, James [Pierce]. I don't think I said my brother's name, who enlisted with me, and that's Bruce.

0:02:23

**Enlistment and boot camp**

**Sims** Okay. Um, when did you both decide to join the Navy?

**Cothrin** My brother and I?

**Sims** Both you...

**Cothrin** Okay.

**Sims** And Mr. Pierce

**Pierce** I joined the Navy in 1948, after I graduated from high school.

**Cothrin** And, uh, my brother and I, uh, decided to join the Navy in October of 1979. Uh, uh, you know, he, uh – he had just finished high school, uh, the previous summer, and, uh, we both just decided to do it together. Um, I mean, I – I dunno what – is that enough?

**Sims** Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

**Cothrin** Okay. Good [*laughs*]. I don't know how in depth you want me to go.

**Sims** No, I just...

**Cothrin** Okay.

**Sims** Whatever – Whatever you'd like to tell us.

**Pierce** [*clears throat*].

**Sims** Um, where did you both attend boot camp?

**Pierce** I attended boot camp in [Naval Station] Great Lakes, Illinois.

**Cothrin** And I – here in Orlando, Florida.

**Sims** What were you trained for, uh – for your career in the Navy?

**Pierce** I was trained as an aviation metalsmith in Memphis, Tennessee, and I spent, uh, um, about three or four months there, waiting to go to school. then I went to nine weeks of school to be an aviation structural mechanic or aviation metalsmith.

**Cothrin** And I, uh, was an aviation maintenance administrator. I went to school in, uh, Meridian, Mississippi,<sup>1</sup> uh, and that was a six-week self-paced course that I finished in a month.

**0:03:57** **Naval Training Center Orlando**

**Sims** Uh, when did you both begin your time at the Naval Training Center Orlando and how did that come about?

**Pierce** I can't remember.

**Cothrin** Okay. I'll talk to mine

**Sims** Okay.

**Cothrin** And then I'll help him with his. Uh, I went – started boot camp in December of 1979 and I finished up in, I believe, it was March – February-March timeframe – of 1980, and subsequently went to San Diego, California, for a month, and then, uh, went to Meridian, Mississippi, and back to San Diego.

My father, uh, was stationed in, uh, NAS [Naval Air Station] Key West, and in 1970 – '74, we – we moved to the Orlando area for a twilight tour. My fa – grandfather had passed away and, uh, we moved up here to, you know, be with my grandmother, right?

**Pierce** Pretty much.

**Cothrin** Okay.

**Sims** Uh, what did you know about the region, uh, militarily or otherwise, before coming to Orlando?

**Pierce** We learned quite a bit about it, because I had been stationed in Sanford, at the, uh, Naval Air Station [Sanford] there, for a number of years, and then I went down to Key West for shore duty, from that sea duty drill, and we came back up here, because we liked Central Florida.

**Cothrin** I – yeah, I lived here. So [laughs]...

**Sims** [laughs].

**Cothrin** I knew the area.

**Sims** Um, how long did you both spend at the Naval Training Center?

**Cothrin** I only did the, uh – spent the time there during boot camp, and my father was there for – from '70...

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<sup>1</sup> Naval Air Station Meridian.

**Pierce** [19]75 to '77.

**Cothrin** Was it '75? or '74?

**Pierce** I think it was '75.

**Cothrin** Okay.

**Sims** Uh, when you first arrived, what were your first impressions of the area?

**Pierce** Same old place [*laughs*].

**Cothrin** [*laughs*] I was in high school, uh, so—I mean, it was okay [*laughs*].

**Sims** What were your first days at the Naval Training Center like?

**Pierce** They were spent primarily training out to become a Company Commander at the Recruit Training Center [Orlando], and, uh, we went to school I think for six weeks, and we learned how to give lectures, and how to march sailors around, and so on and so forth.

**Cothrin** Well, for me, it was, you know [*laughs*]—that first day, you know, you're getting all your gear and, uh, you're learning how to be a sailor, and, uh—so it was interesting [*laughs*].

**Sims** Uh, what were your primary responsibilities while at the Naval Training Center?

**Pierce** I was the Correctional and Instructional Standards Division Officer, and we were, more or less, like a quality control unit. We would visit the various classrooms, and make sure the instructor was following the lesson plan, and completing all the things he had to do to get the point of the lesson across to the students.

**Cothrin** And, for me, I was a recruit. I was there to learn.

**Sims** Um, what was your overall impressions of the recruits and their training during your time at the base?

**Pierce** I was impressed with the quality of all the young men and women that were brought into the Navy, and I thought the recruiters were doing a heck of a good job. There were very few people that[sic], uh, fell out, during my time as a Company Commander, and, uh, it was a great experience. I really enjoyed it.

**Cothrin** Um, I, uh—you know, once you get past that first initial shock, you know, and you—you get into your training group, I think everything went well. I, you know—I, uh, ultimately enjoyed the time I spent there. Um...

0:07:45

**Social life and relationships on base**



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- Sims** What kind of social life existed among the recruits? How often were you allowed to go off base, and what places did you visit locally?
- Cothrin** Uh, I don't think we were allowed to go off base until our training was completed. Uh...
- Pierce** Well, in the middle, wasn't there a two-day weekend?
- Cothrin** Uh, no, I think the only thing we got to do was go to the visitors' center and y'all were allowed to come visit us. That's where the parents and families come – came, at the time that I was there. I do believe.
- Pierce** Okay, yeah. I remember that.
- Cothrin** Okay, and, uh...
- Pierce** That was about right.
- Cothrin** Right, because we were – Bruce – Bruce went into basic training in November, and then I went in in December. So over the Thanksgiving holiday, he was there, and then, over the Christmas holidays, we were both there, and that's where that one picture came from, where we're all four there on those picnic – at those picnic benches.
- Pierce** Okay.
- Cothrin** Yeah.
- Sims** How did your training experiences shape your relationships with the other recruits in your class?
- Cothrin** It was a team-building experience. It – it, you know – it drew you together. Um, you know, taught you how to work together, uh, to accomplish goals.
- Pierce** The – the whole criteria for the Recruit Training Com – Command, As far as recruits and Company Commanders were concern – concerned, was to build them into a team, and it was 180 people on a team.
- Cothrin** It was a lot.
- Pierce** Something like that, and, uh, that was the – the goal was drill into them that they had to work as a team. They would clean the barracks, they would march, and they would do all things together, you know, as a team, and it – it was a rewarding experience to see them develop.
- Sims** Who did you both interact with on a daily basis?

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- Pierce** Uh, there were people who were, um – hey would come around and they would take the – the recruit Company Commander would take the recruits out on the Grinder, and he – there were observers, and they would mark them – see how the training was going, as far as marching and things like that were concerned, and they would come back and open ranks, and do an inspection, and – and it was all very, very formal and, uh – what else do you want?
- Cothrin** Okay. So, uh, my daily interaction was, uh, with our, uh – our, uh – what do you call them? Our, uh...
- Pierce** Company Commander.
- Cothrin** Our Company Commanders, and our, you know – our CPO [Chief Petty Officer] and then our – of course, our, uh, – the other recruits, and then you also interacted with, uh, other instructors, depending on where you were at. Whether you were in weapons training, or some other safety training, or – but for the most part you were with your Company Commanders, you were learning how to fold your clothes, put away your clothes, um, and...
- Pierce** Make your rack.
- Cothrin** Make your bed a certain way. Uh, you were always having inspections. Uh, you know, how to wear your uniform, uh – let's see. We went through firefighter training, and, you know, gas mask training – those kinds of things. They put you through your paces. You had your swim test, you know, uh, [inaudible], you had to float in the water for five minutes, uh, you know, you had to be able to, uh, swim from one end of the pool and back, you know? But, uh – so I don't – I honestly don't remember everything that we do. I do – I do remember the weapons training, the swim test, the marching, the folding of the clothes, the, you know – the bed inspections. You know, you're getting up every day at 5 o'clock in the morning. Uh, you know, going to breakfast, lunch, and dinner. You march there, you march back. You know, they always had somebody up there, you know, letting you know the instructions. You had 20 minutes and 20 minutes only to, you know, get through the line, and eat your meal, and back to wherever it was we met to, you know, march back to wherever we were going next.
- Sims** Uh, what do you remember about the instructors at the base? And what were your impressions of them?
- Cothrin** [inaudible].
- Pierce** I remember them all as being very professional, and they were t – their goal was to set an example for the recruits, [inaudible] in dress and...
- Cothrin** Mannerisms.

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**Pierce** Mannerisms, and conformity to the rules and regulations. Look sharp, you know? Haircuts, and so on and so forth.

**Cothrin** I would agree with him. Uh, the two, uh, Company Commanders that I had were, you know – they were there to set the example, as well as enforce the rules, and, you know, guide us – guide us through the process, and, you know, test us more, test us less, you know, push us harder where we needed to be pushed.

**Pierce** And answer all the questions [*laughs*].

**Cothrin** Yes [*laughs*].

**0:12:47 Hardest part of NTC Orlando, proudest moment, and unforgettable memories**

**Sims** What was the hardest thing you remember doing at the Naval Training Center?

**Cothrin** Um...

**Pierce** For me, it was learning how to stand in front of a class of 180 people and teach them how to do something, you know? And, uh, I wasn't really a formal instructor. I was a hands-on aircraft mechanic, you know, and I was taken from that environment and put in front of all these people, and, uh, it was a very different environment for me, so it was kind of a struggle at the beginning, but I worked my way into it, and I ended up liking it very much.

**Cothrin** I would say for me, uh – not necessarily the hardest thing, but, you know – you get there and you don't know what to expect, and so then it's learning to, uh, achieve the things you need to achieve in the time you have to do it, and So, you're learning at a very rapid pace, uh, and, you know, uh – eh, so as – I don't remember anything being [*sighs*] so terribly difficult. it was just a matter of learning it.

**Sims** Uh, what was the moment you felt most proud at the Naval Training Center?

**Pierce** Graduation.

**Cothrin** I would agree.

**Pierce** When your company pass and review, in front of the reviewing officers and the assembled guests and so on and so forth, it was kind of a proud moment.

**Cothrin** It marked the end of the training cycle also [*laughs*]. You were done [*laughs*].

**Sims** Can you tell me a story of a time at the Naval Training Center that you will never forget?

**Pierce** Not really [*laughs*].

**Sims** Not really [laughs].

**Cothrin** [laughs] Well, I remember the swim test part. Just floating there, and the sky's blue, and you're watching airplanes, and they, uh—and their, uh—whatever you call the smoke thing that goes by, and, you know, that's what I was doing. Sitting there, you know—floating there, thinking about—I was like, *Okay*, as they ticked off the minutes, you know, to complete the test, but, uh—I mean, other than that, um, uh, I, you know—the comradery that, you know—that you had. I mean, once we graduated, we all dispersed, you know, a hundred different ways. Um, I think only one person that I went through boot camp with, uh, went to San Diego—I mean, he went to [Naval Air Station] North Island. So, um...

**0:15:16** **USS *Blue Jacket*, the Grinder, and advanced training**

**Sims** How would you describe to USS *Blue Jacket*, and what was its function?

**Pierce** It was used to familiarize the, uh, recruits with, uh, how confined the living spaces were aboard ship and various aspects of shipboard living, and, uh, it was very helpful. It was a—it was a very, very, very large training aid that was very useful in getting your point across.

**Cothrin** Didn't we do battle station drills and those kinds of things on it, as well? I...

**Pierce** I didn't.

**Cothrin** I, uh—yeah. I, you know—I don't—don't really remember. I—I think we did some sort of drills on the ship. Uh, It wasn't, eh—it was more than just familiarization with a ship. They took us on board. We did things on it. I just don't remember what.

**Sims** Uh, what was the official purpose of the Grinder and what was its significance to you and the recruits?

**Pierce** The Grinder was a very large piece of ground, where as many as nine different companies could get out there and march around, and not—not get involved with one another, if the Company Commander was paying attention [laughs].

**Cothrin** [laughs].

**Pierce** But it was a big area, and, uh, it was very hot in the summertime and kind of cool in the winter time, but, um, it worked very well.

**Cothrin** Cold and wet. I—I mean, because we were out there marching in the cold and it was raining usually, but, uh, it was—it was all about marching out there. I think we did PT [physical training] out there.

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- Pierce** It was also used as a – if somebody was goofing off within the company, you’d tell them to run around the – the Grinder a couple of times as a – it worked off their exuberance, you know?
- Cothrin** [laughs].
- Sims** Uh, what other types of training went on at the base?
- Cothrin** The – the [Naval] Nuclear Power Training Command was there. Uh...
- Pierce** You mean other facilities? Or other things that we taught?
- Sims** Well, you have the basic boot camp recruit training.
- Pierce** Right.
- Sims** And then what other types of training would also go on, like the Nuclear [Power] School?
- Cothrin** Like the NTC part of it? Do you remember what else was out there, other than nuclear training?
- Pierce** No.
- Cothrin** I don’t know. It wasn’t...
- Pierce** But there was instructor training...
- Cothrin** Yeah[?].
- Pierce** And peripheral things like that, to where – to support the Recruit Training Command.
- Sims** Uh, what were other areas on the base that were of particular importance to you or the recruits, and why were these places important?
- Pierce** Well, there was the Firefighting School, which was very important, because, uh, firefighting aboard ship is a[sic] immediate thing that has to be done and done well, and quickly, and thoroughly. I – I was always impressed with that, and there was the gunnery range.
- Cothrin** [inaudible]. We went somewhere.
- Pierce** They had a...
- Cothrin** Yeah.
- Pierce** As I remember here, it was indoors, but in Great Lakes, where I went through boot camp, it was outside.

- Cothrin** I believe it was indoors. I agree with you there.
- Pierce** Yeah.
- Cothrin** Yeah, I mean, I agree with him. The firefighting, you know – you go through the firefighting, uh, class, and one of the films they, of course, show you is the fire on the [USS] *Forrestal*, and that’s something that I think is, you know – they carry though. They still – I think they probably still use that as a training aid today. Uh...
- Pierce** Probably.
- Cothrin** Yeah, I remember the – what’s the oxygen – the liquid oxygen. I remember, Uh – I mean, that was pretty gross, and they showed you a film, uh, with regards to liquid oxygen and what can happen to you if, you know...
- Pierce** If it spills on you.
- Cothrin** Yeah.
- Pierce** It will freeze you.
- Cothrin** Right.
- Pierce** Very cold.
- Cothrin** So, uh – okay [*laughs*].
- Sims** Uh, what was graduation like?
- Cothrin** Um, for me, it was, you know, uh, the marching, and the passing in review, and you know, the, uh – the end of boot camp, and then the beginning of the next, uh, stage of my career in the Navy. Uh, so it, you know – it was being excited and being sad that you’re leaving, you know, the people that you got to know, and then excited to move on to the next thing, and Pride, you know, that you passed. That you got through it.
- Pierce** For me, it was saying “Hello” to a lot of different people, where every recruit wanted to introduce you to their parents, to their loved ones, or whatever, and it was, uh, an emotional day.
- Sims** Uh, what did you do for the Navy upon leaving Naval Training Center Orlando? Did you receive specialized training after your time at Naval Training Center Orlando? And if so, where did that take place?
- Cothrin** Um, I did not go to A School upon graduation of boot camp. I went directly to a squadron. I went to VC-7 [*Tallyhoers*] at, uh, NAS Miramar[, San Diego], California. It was an [Douglas] A-4 [*Skyhawk*] training squadron. Uh, and when

that squadron decommissioned, I think the, uh – not even – less than a year – maybe ten months later, I then went to A School in Meridian, Mississippi, and then, uh, went back to, uh, VF-124 [Fighter Squadron 124] an [Grumman] F-14 [Tomcat] squadron at, uh, NAS Miramar, and...

0:20:46

**Vietnam War and the War in Afghanistan**

**Sims** Were either of you ever in active warzone?

**Pierce** What?

**Cothrin** An active warzone. Have you ever been in an active warzone?

**Pierce** I was over in Vietnam on the line for about three years.

**Sims** Um, can you tell me about arriving in the warzone, and what impact that experience had on you?

**Pierce** Well, you work 12 hours on duty and 12 hours off duty, and that just went on continuously. There were no weekends. There were nothing – you spent 30 days on the line, and then you'd go for a week in Olongapo[, Zambales] in the Philippines for liberty, and, um, it was pretty arduous and, uh emotional at times, because you'd lose airplanes and so on and so forth.

**Sims** Uh, did you receive any medals or citations during that time?

**Pierce** I received, um – what's the orange and green one?

**Cothrin** It's a Navy Commendation Medal.

**Pierce** Yeah, and now, the green and white one is...

**Cothrin** Navy Achievement.

**Pierce** Navy Achievement Medal.

**Cothrin** Okay.

**Pierce** Yeah, I received both of those and a whole bunch of service awards from various places of – of the world: Korea, Vietnam, Mediterranean Occupation Medal.

**Cothrin** North Atlantic? [inaudible]. Not – I don't know if it was North Atlantic, but you were up there too.

**Pierce** And I crossed the Arctic Circle a number of times, but I didn't – they didn't give a ribbon for that. Crossed the Equator two or three times – maybe four, to get back [laughs].

**Cothrin** For me, I was mobilized, uh, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Uh, spent two years at CENTCOM [United States Central Command]. Um, after that, eight months, uh, I spent in Qatar. Uh, it was a, uh, very interesting and rewarding experience, the two years that I spent, uh, mobilized. Uh, it was interesting to go to Qatar. Uh, I – that’s the second country I had ever been to, outside the United States. The first was Mexico [*laughs*] – Tijuana[, Baja California, Mexico]. So, uh, it – it was interesting seeing the culture, uh, seeing the area, and then, uh, you know, like my dad said, it was, uh, generally a 15-16-hour workday, but, uh, it was a good experience.

0:23:10

**Leaving the Navy and post-naval life**

**Sims** Uh, do you both recall the day your service ended? and what was that like?

**Cothrin** Uh, I – yes. So I got out of the Navy, uh, October 1, 1982 – ‘82 or ‘81 [*laughs*]. Okay. ‘82, because my son was born in November of ‘82. So, uh, it was a sad experience for me. I wasn’t ready to get out of the Navy. So, uh, once my husband and I transferred to Pensacola, it took six months, and then I found a billet in a [U.S. Naval] Reserve unit, and then I spent the rest of my career, uh, in Reserve units. Starting out in aviation units, and into intel[ligence] units. Um, you know, and through the course of my, uh, 29 years in the – in the Reserve, you know – active and Reserve program, uh, you know, did my two years mobilization at CENTCOM, and I, uh, had worked at, uh, Joint Task Force Forge[?] [*inaudible*]. I did [*inaudible*], uh – active duty down there with them, when we were stationed down there. So, I mean, I had a very full and interesting career. So, for you, Dad, you retired in, uh, 1977.

**Pierce** Right. I think it was September 1<sup>st</sup>, and, uh – just another day, to me. No ceremony. I didn’t have a ceremony or anything like that.

**Sims** Uh, what did you do after you left the Navy?

**Pierce** I got a job in, uh, Sanford with a machine shop company, and they made, Uh, what’s called a “fax machine” now, but this was the very beginning, and it was a thing that went around in circles, and it printed letters, and so on and so forth. There was no vocal, but it was all – you could transmit a – a letter on this circular thing, and it went through the air somehow, and got there and...

**Cothrin** Was that QWIP [Technologies]?

**Pierce** Yeah, QWIP.

**Cothrin** QWIP, and it was a company that...

**Pierce** Went through the telephone. You had to call up, get ahold of the machine, and then you put the thing in there, and then you turn the machine on, and it would transmit the piece of paper. Very archaic, really.



**Cothrin** [laughs].

**Pierce** Compared to today.

**Cothrin** And, for me, um, I worked two jobs. So I had my Reserve career and then I had—I worked for the Army since 1993. Uh, and that's when I started working full-time again.

**Sims** Have either of you kept in touch with anyone from the Naval Training Center?

**Pierce** I haven't.

**Cothrin** No, I—me neither. No.

**Sims** What values or characteristics of the Navy do you believe made an impression on your life?

**Pierce** The discipline, the organization, and the orientation of doing your—having to plan out everything and having to work your way through it. It was an organizational—a very strict class in organizational responsibilities, and—get 'er done.

**Cothrin** Right. Uh, you know, I would have to say—I would have to go to, you know, uh, something similar. Uh...

**Pierce** [clears throat].

**Cothrin** And say, I mean, the caliber of people that were there that you worked with, uh, the things that you did. Uh, I mean, it was just a—it was a great experience. Um, I mean, I, you know, would recommend it to other people. to young folks that—if they don't really, you know, have it figured out—what it is that they want to do, uh—spend four years in the Navy and—or any service—and, uh, see the world a little bit, and, uh, meet people from all walks of life. It's a big melting pot. You learn a lot.

**Pierce** You grow up in a hurry.

**0:27:23** **How Central Florida has changed over time**

**Sims** How has, uh, Central Florida changed since the time you spent here?

**Cothrin** A lot [laughs]. A lot.

**Pierce** Probably expanded three- or four-fold, population-wise. We—we retired in '77.

**Cothrin** You retired in '77. Yes.

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**Pierce** So we were transferred here in '75, I think, from Key West, Florida, and, uh, from the day I retired 'til today, the place has – has really grown, and the population has...

**Cothrin** Probably [inaudible].

**Pierce** Doubled – tripled, probably

**Cothrin** Quadrupled, probably.

**Pierce** Yeah.

**Cothrin** I think they can remember when, you know – I can remember my mom and dad talking about when [Florida State Road] 436 was a dirt road.

**Pierce** Right.

**Cothrin** Okay[?].

**Pierce** Yeah.

**Cothrin** Uh...

**Pierce** It only went part way down to the airport and then it was a dirt road.

**Cothrin** My grandparents – I don't know when my grandparents moved here. Was it in the '50s or the '60s that they retired down here?

**Pierce** I think in the late '50s.

**Cothrin** The late 50s. They came down, um, from New York. So as kids, you know, we were coming – wherever we lived – because I grew up here in Florida, Uh, there was only one period of time when he was stationed outside of Florida, from the time I was born. So we've lived – I was born in Jacksonville. We've lived in Pensacola, Key West, and Central Florida. So we've done the gambit. So Florida – I'm a Floridian [*laughs*].

**Pierce** The squadron I was in was stationed in Sanford, but it deployed on a carrier that was home-ported in San Diego. So it would take three days to airlift the squadron out, and then three days to bring us back. When you got home finally, it was – it was, uh – I can't think of the word I want to say. You had to move a lot of gear around to get your job done when, uh – when you were aboard ship.

**Cothrin** It was a logistics, uh, exercise.

**Pierce** Yes.

0:29:36

Legacy of NTC Orlando and the Lone Sailor Memorial Project

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- Sims** What do you think is the lasting legacy of the Naval Training Center and the Navy in general in the Central Florida region?
- Pierce** I really don't know. I'm sure it has a[sic] historical impact, but other than that, I really don't know.
- Cothrin** As far as today, the impact of the base, because it—it closed in the '80s? '90s? I don't remember when it closed. Uh, But I mean—I think it had, uh, an impact while it was here. Uh, and it—and it had an impact for some time after it closed. Um, certainly, you know, you go there and look at Baldwin Park, you know, there's no real sign that the Naval Training Center or Recruit Training Command, uh, ever existed. I mean, there's little, little things, and I think that's the purpose of the whole, uh, Lone Sailor, uh, Memorial [Project]—is—is to try to bring back something here in the Orlando area to remind folks that, hey, at one point in time, there was this, uh, Naval Training Center here and Recruit Training Command, and bring back some of that heritage.
- Pierce** One of the things that I remember is: on Friday, up over the weekends, maybe half a dozen companies would get liberty and the seet[sic]—and the streets were just lined with sailors, and it would—it was just amazing, and then all of a sudden, they were gone, you know? And that—that was a visual impact I'm sure for a lot of these civilians around here.
- Sims** What do you think former naval personnel would like to see or be reminded of when they visit the site of the base and the Lone Sailor Memorial?
- Pierce** They would probably like to take their parents or guests around and point out various things that were helpful in their training, and, uh, show the Grinder and so on and so forth, where we marched, and the various [inaudible] buildings where they went to school.
- Cothrin** Well[?], they're not there anymore though [laughs].
- Pierce** Well, that's true.
- Cothrin** Yeah, I mean, I guess part of the Grinder is still there. They use it as a—there—there's[sic], uh, park-like areas in part of it. , uh, I mean, the *Blue Jacket* is gone. It would have been nice if something like that had stayed, but it didn't. Uh, and it—and I'm sure it had to do with upkeep, as well. Um, you know...
- Pierce** The *Blue Jacket* was a model ship, right?
- Cothrin** Yes.
- Pierce** Okay. It was just—it wasn't very big. It was about half as big as a destroyer, maybe a little bit smaller, but it, uh—it served as a good training aid. It was a good visual thing for the recruits to see their first ship or something like that [clears throat].

0:32:44

**Closing remarks**

**Sims** Is there anything you would like to share about your naval experience?

**Pierce** I would recommend it for everybody. It was a wonderful experience, as far as I'm concerned. You can't imagine how precise everything is – the way they start flying in the morning and end up in the evening, after dark generally. Sometimes they flying around the clock, but an aircraft carrier is one of the busiest places in the world, but every hour – hour and a half – you're launching or recovering airplanes. That goes on all day long. Sometimes 24 hours a day, depending on what kind of a mission or training exercise you're in. There's always – around the carrier, there's usually a cruiser and at least [coughs] five or six destroyers, and the destroyers act as plane guards, in case one of the planes goes into the water. They rescue the pilot, if they get there before the helicopter and so on and so forth, but, uh, before the helicopter, they were primarily the – the guy that pulled the man out of the water that was in there, but, uh, I wouldn't trade it.

**Cothrin** What was the question again? [laughs].

**Sims** [laughs].

**Pierce** [coughs].

**Sims** If there was just anything else you'd like to share about your experience in the Navy.

**Cothrin** Uh...

**Pierce** [coughs].

**Cothrin** Again, like my father said, I would recommend it. Uh, certainly for, you know – it's just a broadening experience for anybody. Uh, and there's no better way to have a job, travel, and kind of – you're taken care of. Uh, So I had an incredible career for, uh, nearly 30 years. I retired in, uh, 2009. I went into the Navy in 1979. So, um, I loved it, um, like[?] my dad.

**Sims** Well, thank you for talking with me today and for sharing, uh, your experiences with me.

**Pierce** Thank you.

**Cothrin** Thank you.

**Pierce** [clears throat].

*End of Interview*