

Oral Memoirs
Of
Richard Tobias Sloane

An Interview Conducted by
Carolyn "Carli" Van Zandt

March 5, 2014

Community Veterans History Project

Lone Sailor Memorial Project

University of Central Florida RICHES of Central Florida

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Interview Histories

Interviewer: Carolyn “Carli” Van Zandt

Cameraperson: Fernando Maldonado

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 Richard Tobias Sloane is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on March 5, 2014.

Abstract

Oral history interview of Richard Tobias Sloane, who served in the U.S. Navy from 1964 to 1969, during the Vietnam War. Sloane was born in New York City, New York, on March 4, 1934. In August of 1964, he was commissioned into the Navy. Sloane served in Vietnam from September 1967 to September 1968. He also served on the USS *Rockbridge*, USS *Santa Barbara* in River Section 35, the USS *Garcia*, the USS *Wisconsin*, and the USS *Blue Jacket*. Sloane achieved the rank of Captain and earned a Purple Heart, Bronze Star with V Device, Legion of Merit, Combat Action Award, and Navy E Ribbon.

This oral history interview was conducted by Carolyn “Carli” Van Zandt on March 5, 2014. Interview topics include Sloane's background, joining the Navy, the USS *Rockbridge*, Officer Candidate School (OCS), the Vietnam War, Naval Training Center (NTC) Orlando, the Grinder, the USS *Blue Jacket*, airbases in Central Florida, the simulation industry, and the Lone Sailor Memorial Project.

Richard Tobias Sloane

Oral History Memoir
Interview Number 2

Interviewed by Carolyn “Carli” Van Zandt
March 5, 2014
Orlando, Florida

0:00:00

Introduction

Van Zandt Alright. Well, thank you for coming today. I’m so glad that you made it.

Sloane My pleasure.

Van Zandt Today is March 5th[, 2014] and I’m interviewing Mr. Richard Tobias Sloane, and he served in the United States Navy. Uh, we are doing this history project for the Lone Sailor Memorial [Project]. My name is [Carolyn] “Carli” Van Zandt, uh, and my cameraperson is Fernando Maldonado. We are interviewing Mr. Sloane as part of, uh, the Community Veteran History Project and Loan Sailor Memorial Project. Uh, recording here today, in the Education Building, Room 123 – the conference room – in Orlando, Florida. Mr. Sloane, will you please begin by telling us a little bit about, uh, what branch of service you were in and your rank, uh, which you retired at?

Sloane I was in the United States Navy. I retired as a Captain in [20]06 in the United States Navy. Started my service in 1964 at the Officer Candidate School in Newport, Rhode Island.

0:00:57

Background

Van Zandt Okay. Thank you. Uh, I’m going to get a little background information here. Can you tell us when you were born? Where you was born?

Sloane I was born on March the 4th, 1943. Yesterday was my birthday, so this is very appropriate. I was born in, uh, the Borough of Queens, New York City, in the State of New York.

Van Zandt Alright. What did your parents do for a living?

Sloane My father was a, uh – a wholesale merchant in dry goods in New York, on the lower eastside of Manhattan. My mother was a homemaker, and later in her life, she was in retail, uh, store sales in New York – in Long Island, actually.

Van Zandt Um, do you have brothers, sisters?

Sloane I have two older brothers. Uh, my oldest brother was retired Navy Captain also. He attended the United States Naval Academy – Class of 1957, and, uh, the middle brother, um, attended Harvard University, and Harvard, uh, Business School.

0:01:58 **Enlistment and the USS *Rockbridge***

Van Zandt Alright. Uh, would you tell me a little about how, uh, your family life may have impacted your decision to, uh, enter the Navy?

Sloane Well, there was no doubt in my mind that my oldest brother, who's about seven years, uh, my senior, if you will, uh, attended the Naval Academy when I was young, uh, junior high school, uh, person, and watching him go through that academy for four years and then his, uh – the beginning of his military service definitely had an impact my decision to join the Navy. When I completed my studies at Boston University – and in 1964, the – the draft was still in effect – and the choices were to continue my education, at the time, or to be drafted, or to sign up for the service, uh, of my choice, and at the time, I picked that choice to be in the United States Navy. I didn't realize, at the time, it would be a career choice, uh, but I enjoyed my early years in the service, such that I decided to stick around.

Van Zandt Okay. So tell me more about, um, what impacted your decision to stick around.

Sloane Well, I had a great first assignment. I came out of college at about 22 years old, uh – maybe even younger, at the time, and, uh, I was assigned to a ship called the USS *Rockbridge* – hull number APA-228, and that was a, uh – an amphibious troupe transport from the World War II era. Uh, the mission of the ship was to embark Marines – about 800 Marines – and associated cargo, and land on the shore in amphibious landings, and, uh, the, uh, manning of that ship – the Ward Room – if you will, the “Officer Car” – was made up with a lot of, uh, old timers, uh – warrants, mustangs as department heads. People who had been former enlisted[?], came up in the ranks, and they were sort of like – I don't want to classify them as grandfatherly types – but they were very, uh, mature in there service, and, uh, the Commanding Officers of the ship when I was there, under which I had three Commanding Officers, were also senior Navy Captains who were on their way to major command and, uh, come[sic] out of aviation, and were going to head to larger ships, if you will. So again, they were very self-confident individuals, very accomplished people, and the younger officers, like myself, were all fresh, wet-behind-the-ears college kids, and so it was a very, very, um, engaging environment, um, a very learning environment, while, obviously, there's a lot of pressure you to anything you do in that Navy environment.

It was such that you – you felt that you was learning, you felt like you were being mentored, uh, and I came away from that tour, uh, very, very, uh, personally fulfilled and – and feeling good about what I was doing. The sense of

responsibility, that you got, which has always been, uh, something the Navy has played on for young beginners – that we’re going to give you, uh, tremendous responsibility that your peers, who were out working at Macy’s or selling insurance aren’t going to experience for a long, long time, and I found that to be true, because, uh, they give you things to do, and say, “Here’s a job. Go do it.” And they had enough faith in you to let you do it – to watch you close enough, so they wouldn’t let you mess up too bad. So it was a very, very good experience, as I look back on it over the years. I think that was principally what made me feel comfortable about staying in the Navy.

0:05:44

Officer Candidate School

Van Zandt You mentioned that you got this, uh, officer start before you did this first duty assignment through, um, Officer Candidate School, or OCS?

Sloane Correct.

Van Zandt Could you tell me a little bit about, um, what that experience is like?

Sloane Well, talk about the shock of your life. You come out of a university, a – very, uh, loving home, uh, environment, as I grew up. Um, so you leave the university. Again, you’ve had a sense of what service life might be like, because of my brother’s experience, but obviously, you really don’t know exactly what you’re getting into, and I remember, at the time, there was only a ferry that crossed from the main land over to Newport, [inaudible] Island, unless you wanted to go all the way up and around, by Fall River[, Massachusetts] and Providence[, Rhode Island]. Today, they have a bridge, but I remember on that ferry, as I reported for duty to go to OCS, and looking out over the water and said, what *have I done?* [laughs]. That sort of thing, because I didn’t know what I was headed for, but it was also a very, uh, broadening and lightening experience, because most of my childhood and my college experience, for the most part, was very, um – I forget what the right word is – but very, uh contained.

Uh, it wasn’t broadening. It was broadening educationally and, again, growing up in New York, you have a broadened sense of what life could be like, but I had never, uh, been in an environment with people from the South, people from the West, people from all sorts of cultures, uh – that sort of thing, and now you’re thrown into a barracks environment, uh, which is not quite the same as a college dormitory or fraternity house. Um, you’re – you’re being asked to do things in a very regimented way, uh, being held very, very responsible and accountable for the most minute, uh, daily life, uh, activities, and so while it wasn’t a shock, uh, it was certainly different. and it is a crash course, so your – things that, uh, people in NROTC [Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps] programs or Academy programs are getting years and years of time to, uh, uh acculture[sic] to and learn. You’re getting a crash course. It’s not that – it wasn’t that challenging or difficult, but you certainly had pay attention, and again, aside from the

academics, the military side, um – it was just an enlightening experience. Mostly, in – in the exposure to people of different cultures, uh, uh, than ever before.

0:08:20

Graduation

Van Zandt Graduation day.

Sloane Wow. You know, the funny thing was, uh, I can't remember exactly – the whole program was about four months, and, uh, at about maybe three weeks before you graduate, uh, you get your orders, and the way you get your orders is, uh, you're in a company of 30 men – maybe your class had a couple hundred in it, but, um – so you're in a company of 30 men, and you get a – a message, if you will, to report to the barracks chief or the company chief at the company headquarters, and he's going to tell you where you're going, and I'll never forget, he – he said – he said "Sloane, you're going to the USS *Rockbridge*, APA228." and I said, "Chief, what's that?" [laughs].

I had no idea, because with all that indoctrination, I don't think we ever got down into the grass as to ship types, you know? it was mostly here's how you, uh, get from point A to point B, here's how you do this, a lot of PT [physical training], uh, this, that, and the other thing, a lot of naval history. Uh, but I – I remember to this day, he told me where I was going, I had no idea what kind of ship it was or anything of that nature. So, uh, that was a little before graduation, but graduation day, you're filled with pride, you have your ensign stripe[?], uh, and your off on a real, real adventure, you know? You're glad to be leaving that environment, but you're full of apprehension, because now, you're going to be really entering the workforce, sort of to speak.

0:09:53

Repair Division Officer

Van Zandt 'Kay. So you're trained as a – a new ensign. What was your actual job as a new ensign?

Sloane Well, my first job, again, was in the engineering department, and I was the [Repair] Division Officer for the repair division. The Division Officer – you're in charge of a group of enlisted men and – with a specific function – and their job was metalsmith and woodworking, if you will, on this ship. So, um, they were doing all that type of work. It was a small group. Uh, I was sort of fortunate and respected, instead of being put immediately in charge of a large division, which might've been at least 30 men or 40 men. It was small, compact.

Again, a lot of good leadership, you know? It's always the Chief Petty Officer in the Navy who really knows what's going on and runs the Navy. and especially when you're brand new, I mean, you – even with what little book-learning you got, you have not a great idea on the technical aspects of what the people are doing, you're worried about all the different aspects of being able to stand the watch, drive a ship, um, do your daily duties, oversee the people who are working for you – or working with you, uh, – that sort of thing, and again, it was

a lot of—I don't want to use the word "old timers" — but Senior Chief Petty Officers, uh, who had a lot of experience and confidence in their work, um, middle-grade Petty Officers. It was a good bunch. It was the right place for me to go for a start, because I had a lot of support from below.

0:11:22

Vietnam War

Van Zandt Okay. Um, your early assignments — it sounds like you had a lot of on-the-job training, do you think it is because it was the Vietnam [War] era?

Sloane Well, uh, if you're talking about the first ship, absolutely, you know? I mean, uh, at the time, a lot of people were going over to Vietnam. Uh, my second tour duty was in Vietnam, and by the time I have spent about two and a half years on that ship, I had, uh, changed jobs on the ship. I was, uh, made gunnery officer on that ship, which was — gave me an opportunity to learn another aspect of, uh, ship ward responsibility and duties, and so again, when I, uh, finished up that tour in about two in a half years, uh, I was very confident. I had, uh, been promoted one grade from ensign to Lieutenant Junior grade. Very proud, and, uh, left that ship with a great deal of confidence, I think.

Van Zandt Great. Um, can you tell me a little about your Vietnam experience?

Sloane I [laughs]...

Van Zandt As much as you can.

Sloane Well, uh, absolutely. Um, Funny thing is, um: I—I mentioned earlier that I worked with these great people, you know? Uh, uh, as many warrants and LDOs [limited duty officers] who had maturity, a lot of experience, um, and how I got to Vietnam, I always thought was an interesting story. The Navy Bureau of Naval Personnel put out a newsletter about every month that they — a hard copy paper newsletter, and they went to every ship, and it — it really talked about what assignments were available to different people and different grade, what was happening in the personnel management area, um, and they came out with an article that said they were looking for Lieutenants Junior grade to be the Commanding Officers of LSTs, uh — "Landing Ship Tanks" — uh, to serve as mother ships for river patrol boats in Vietnam. So these LSTS would be at the mouths of the river, they would be the mother ship for 10 or 20 small river patrol boats, and they wanted Lieutenant JGs [Junior Grade] to be, uh, XOs. They wanted them to be XOs — Executive Officers, and I read that article, and, uh, my boss, at the time, was a Lieutenant, uh — LDO — an "old salt," who I greatly admired, and he read that article. They were looking for Lieutenants to be Commanding Officers — Lieutenant JGs was to XOs to these LSTs, and he reads this article, and he says — he says, "Boy, I want to be a CO of a, LST." And he said, "Rich, come be my XO." You know, "We'll go together." I'll — he'll be the CO and I'll be the XO of this LST.

Well, [*clears throat*] to go from being a Division Officer to an Executive Officer is highly unusual. Uh, but here is an opportunity, because it fit the mold, uh, of what they were looking for in Vietnam. I said, "Absolutely." and I immediately wrote my detailer – the guy in Washington[, D.C.] who made these assignments – and – and, uh, I said, "I want to go be an XO on an LST, just like you wrote you needed, uh – uh, JGs to be XOs on LST. I want that job." He wrote back – [*clears throat*] he said – corresponded back, "You know, you're a little too junior," because you're in the JG billet for a number of years, uh – JG rank. Said, "You're a little too junior, but we have lots of other jobs available for ya in Vietnam." I said, "Okay." I said, "But don't give me a desk job. I want a job where the action is." Next thing you know, I had a letters to a river patrol section that drove little plastic boats on the rivers of the Mekong Delta. So that's how I got there.

Van Zandt Wow.

Sloane Yeah, I know, and then [*laughs*] – and then, my boss – I don't think he ever got the job of CO. He did – he may have gotten an LST, but I don't know that he had one off of Vietnam. Um, I spent a year. The tour that you got was a year. It was a small outfit – maybe a hundred people, if that. Uh, Most of them were assigned to run the boats, and the others were assigned as maintenance people. Uh, there was[sic], uh, two Lieutenants and three Lieutenants Junior grade, who made the officer structure. Then you had a number of Chief Petty Officers, and a host of, UH, other enlisted personnel, who manned the boats, and we spent a year patrolling the rivers of Vietnam.

Van Zandt What impact do you think this experience had on you?

Sloane Well, it had a tremendous impact. Um, you know, you sad[sic] in the sense that you were at war. You were certainly, uh, aware of that. Um, I think it was Winston [Leonard Spencer-] Churchill who said something like, "There is nothing more exhilarating than being shot at and missed."¹ Uh, and I had that experience. Um, uh, we've lost a number of people from our section to combat, while I was there, and I respect – I consider myself fortunate that I – that I, uh, um, didn't have a harrowing[?] experience that – that cost me more than it did, so to speak. Um, uh, it was interesting to be in country, in – in that environment – to meet people of Vietnam, um, in many different, uh, ways, if you will. Um, and that's about it.

Van Zandt Do you think, um, your time through these, uh – the last two assignments that you just described help shape your leadership style?

Sloane Uh, yeah, I think to some degree. That's hard to say, um, how you developed, what – what it was that caused you to develop your leadership. I think more, uh – I don't know. I only speak for myself, but I think more it was my

¹ Correction: "There is nothing more exhilarating than to be shot at with no result."

upbringing than anything else. There's all sorts of leaders – different people. Some lead in fear, some lead in – in different manners, and I just think it was the way that I was brought up that really, uh, set the foundation for my leadership style. I think a lot of your style is not so much developed in those early years, but further as you go along, you get more responsibility. Certainly there was a lot of responsibility from day one at different levels, and – and very significant responsibility, but my impression was: the further along you got, the more leadership experience you had. You had the opportunity to observe other leaders, you know? The – the common phrase, as well, eh, you know; "I'm not going to do it like he did it when I grow up." That sort of thing. So, uh, how you developed it is – is a, in my opinion – for me, at least, is a combination of a lot of things: my personal upbringing, the experiences that I had as you climb that ladder can really shape.

0:18:09

Other assignments

Van Zandt Thank you. What other, um, duty assignments did you take after your tour in Vietnam and prior to coming to NTC [Naval Training Center] Orlando?

Sloane Right. I came back from Vietnam and I was, uh, selected to go what then called the "Navy Destroyers School,"² which was really a course to prepare you to be a department head on a destroyer-type, um, ship. Um, that was a six-month course in Newport, Rhode Island. I met my wife there, during that time period. I courted her, eh, in – in those years – that time frame. Um, Went to USS *Garcia* DE-1040. Home-ported out of Newport, Rhode Island, as the Weapons [Systems] Officer.

Um, from there, uh, I have to think back. I went to the USS – oh, excuse me. From there, I went to, uh, instructor duty at what was then the beginning of the Navy Surface Warfare Officers School and served as an instructor to ensigns, who were coming from their commissioning source before they were going to surface ships, and, uh, that was about three-year tour in Newport, and then I went to USS *Milwaukee* AOR-2 – I think it was. Homeport in Norfolk, Virginia, a multiproduct ship, uh, stationed out of Norfolk, Virginia. Great tour of duty, great, uh, shipmates there. Again, uh, a tremendous learning experience as a department head for the deck department. Uh, A lot of responsibility, a lot of work there. From *Milwaukee*, we went to shore duty in Millington, Tennessee – a little bit north of Memphis, where the Navy had its, uh, training headquarters, and, uh, I served on, uh, the staff of, uh, Naval Education and Training [Command] – technical training – in Memphis – Millington.

Uh, from there, after a short one year tour, um, I went to Hawaii, uh, to be, uh, Executive Officer on the USS *Hassayampa*, an oiler in, uh, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Another great tour. Uh, I think the, uh, thing that made my career so gratifying was the great shipmates and the leaders that I worked with over the years on

² Correction: Naval Destroyers School.

these ships. From Hawaii, came back to Norfolk and served on the staff of, uh, Commander Carrier Group 8. Went to sea on aircraft carriers as a Surface Warfare Advisor, if you will – surface op[eration]s officer. Completed that tour, working for a couple of flag officers, and from there, let's see. Where'd we go? [U.S.] Naval War College, I believe. Tour[?] in Newport, Rhode Island, at the Naval War College. A very int – interesting time, and then went to, um, command the USS *Santa Barbara*, uh, AE-28, out of Charleston, South Carolina. Was on board there for about two in half years, in command of the *Santa Barbara*. Went from there to, uh, the Executive Officer of Service Schools[sic] Command. [Naval Station] Great Lakes – very large training activity, uh, up in Great Lakes, Illinois, just north of Chicago[, Illinois], and from there, I came to Orlando, Florida, in command of the Service School Command Activity here at the Naval Training Center Orlando. So it was all in route, but we got there.

Van Zandt That's quite a list

Sloane Yeah. I'll say.

0:21:52

Wife and children

Van Zandt Alright. This one's about your wife. You ready for this one?

Sloane I'm sorry? Sure.

Van Zandt This one's about your wife. They say in the military, you great two for one. How did you do with the family, the military, and the traveling? How did she deal[?] with that?

Sloane Well, we were very fortunate. I've always felt that way. Um, my wife was ready, willing, and able for the adventure. She was a Navy nurse actually, when I met her when she was in college, and she was, uh, attending on a – a little bit of a scholarship at the end of her college tour, where, in exchange for tuition assistance, she went in the Navy as a Navy nurse, and in those days, if you became pregnant, they mustered you out, and so she was in for a little over a year in an half, until she became pregnant without first child, and had to muster out. So she had a little taste of the Navy, besides from the fact of growing up – not going up – but going to school in Newport, Rhode Island, as she did, which is where I met her, uh, she was exposed to all the Navy activity that went on in Newport, Rhode Island, at the time.

Um, so we enjoyed the Navy. Nobody enjoys leaving your family for six months at a time and Nowadays, sailors are leaving there families for even longer, but, uh, typical six-month deployment then was not something you looked forward to from a family standpoint-of-view, but she – she understood that and, uh, was a great Navy wife. You know, they say, uh, a Navy wife's the toughest job in the Navy, and I believe it 110 percent, and our children, uh, my wife, and I always – we moved around a lot, you know? And describing where I went, it was here, there. We came back a couple times, but it was never back to back tours in the

same town, and unlike some, who said, “Oh, I don’t want to leave Norfolk,” or “I gotta stay in San Diego[, California].” We were always up for that adventure, and after a year or two went by, the kids were always saying, “Where are we going next?” That sort of thing. Got a little tougher when they got to the junior high/high school age, but up ‘til then, they were always ready, willing, and able to – “Let’s find a new place to go.” And, uh, that was pretty good. I’d always come home, after having spoken with the detailer, getting the word on where we were going. Uh, I’d call home and say, “Honey, Are you sitting down?” And she knew that was the signal [*laughs*] that we were going somewhere. Yep.

0:24:18

Naval Training Center Orlando

Van Zandt Good. Um, well, what did you know about the region of Orlando and the military here?

Sloane I’m sorry.

Van Zandt What did you know about the region of Orlando?

Sloane Well, I didn’t know anything about it expect that they had a mirror of activity of Great Lakes on a smaller scale. Uh, Navy training activity, smaller in numbers, but the mission was basically the same, and I lobbied to get that job of Commanding Officer. I say lobbied. You know, I – you talked to your detailer and say “Hey. I hear there’s a job opening in Orlando. Uh, it seems to fit. I’m training in education subspecialist. I’ve done the tour as Executive Officer here. Um, and I hear the Commanding Officer tour for the Service School Command is open there.” I was fortunate to get that assignment, and again, uh, the only, uh – the biggest impression was if the kids were a little, uh, anxious in moving in that point in time, because they were in junior high [school] and getting little more into socializing. Uh, When I told them that we’d probably have a pool at the house, that settled the deal [*laughs*]. “Let’s go.” They were ready to pack and move – move down here. So I didn’t know much about it. That was it. Um, that was it.

Van Zandt How long were you here at NTC Orlando?

Sloane Well, we got here in 1988, and I retired from that job in 1991. So...

Van Zandt Okay.

Sloane That was the tour.

Van Zandt Um, what were your overall impressions of the recruits and their training, during that time down [inaudible] your time at the base?

Sloane Oh, I thought it was terrific. You know, I was – really, there were three activities. You had the Recruit Training Center, You had the Nuclear Power School, and you had Service Schools Command. So, uh, while we did have some interaction

in between all those activities, um, the sailors that – that I was seeing, uh, who were coming, from the most part, out of boot camp – uh, We did have some coming to advanced schools, uh, from the fleet, but the majority of them are coming right out of boot camp – uh, just top quality, you know?

People have said that the quality of our servicemen and women today are – is better than ever, and they have said it for years and years, and I firmly believe it. A lot of people who say, “Ah, it’s not like the old Navy,” and they talk about things like uniforms and discipline, which is always important, but the, uh, quality, the intellect, uh, the upbringing – if you will – uh, of the people that[sic] are coming into the service, I thought was terrific, and I saw that throughout my career. You know, you’re in that moving stream, so you don’t always see the difference, but when you think about it, and you stop and you think, and you say, *Look at the quality of the Electronic Technicians School, who are going through Torpedoman [Mate] School* – some of these highly technical courses – You have to really, you know, learn some significant stuff or hone their skills. Um, we had top-quality people.

0:27:11

Daily life and training at NTC Orlando

Van Zandt Alright. Um, Daily life for your, uh, Navy recruits and your Navy sailors, that[sic] are there training for the schools – what was it like?

Sloane Well, again, the people that[sic] were in my school, for the most part, were brand new, coming from out of 8-12 weeks of Recruit Training Center. So you still had to be aware of their conduct more off the base than on the base. Remember, these are young people who been cooped up at recruit training, where they didn’t get any liberty for months on end, if you will. Now, they’ve been cut loose, so to speak. Uh, yes[?], you go to class, but you had your weekends off, sort of thing.

I think, on the whole, uh, and really across the board, we had very few discipline problems – things of that nature. Again, in a – in an organization that size, deal with that demographic, there will be individuals who really weren’t suited for the service, or who had a momentary lapse in judgment, shall we say, and so that’s typical in any large organization. I don’t think it – it’s not so visible in civilian – civilian life, you know? If some fella who’s working on the line in General Motors [Company] goes out and gets arrested for DUI [Driving Under the Influence], or something like that, General Motors doesn’t really hold him to task. Well, the military’s a little different on how it, uh, wants its people to represent the organization.

Van Zandt Okay. Uh, couple of, uh, questions here, uh, for those who – who don’t know. Could you explain to us what the Grinder was?

Sloane What the what?

Van Zandt The Grinder was.

Sloane Oh, the Grinder [*laughs*]. Well, I got very familiar with the Grinder at OCS, because the Grinder was where you – in OCS, you walked off punishment. I mean, it was the parade ground, and it was usually a paved a, uh – asphalt, uh, parade ground, uh, on which you’d have formal parades, but OCS – if you – if you didn’t make your bed right, or there was a dust bunny loose, or if your shoes weren’t shined, uh, when the other folks were going on liberty on Saturday, you were out there marching for two or three hours. Uh, And again, at – at boot camp, the Grinder was, again, the place where graduation was held, but again, uh, conduct infractions were marched off often times.

Van Zandt Alright, and, um, the purpose of the USS *Blue Jacket*?

Sloane Yeah, the *Blue Jacket* was, uh, a wooden replica, if you will, of a ship – a destroyer-type ship, and it had – internally, it had classrooms. Externally, it had fittings that you would find on, uh, a real ship. a life boat, or a whale boat, if you will, that could be lowered, raised, chocks, and bits, and lines, anchor chain, and halyards, and all the things that a sailor in – in the field of seamanship might encounter on a real ship, and so, uh, they can go on board that – that trainer, um, uh, and, uh, do the things that they would be asked to do out in the fleet, and they could also hold classes there. Uh, it was a – a fixture, if you will. A lot of people were sad to see it go.

Van Zandt Okay. What kind of social life existed among the recruits on the base through the MWR – Morale, Welfare, and Recreation?

Sloane Right. Uh, the interesting fact is: when I retired from the Navy in 1991, uh, the first position I took as a civilian was director of the USO [United Service Organization], here in Central Florida, Which, in a sense, was responsible a little bit for the MWR. I mean, the base had its own MWR organization, which was really the root of it. Uh, when I was on active duty, I personally took advantage of it. They had great gym, and weights, and facilities, and pool – all those sorts of things that you would want on the base. They had opportunities for sailors to buy tickets to local events and theme parks – uh, the typical Morale, Welfare and Rec, uh, support system. The USO was there also, primarily to support, uh, the families that came to see the recruits graduate every week at – at, uh, the Naval Training Center, but, uh, the MWR ran some great programs. They always were there. I remember the people who were – for the most part, many were retired military who were running the programs. They had a golf course, which was, uh, one of the premiere, I think, spots in town, to play golf for the retired Navy community and active duty when they were on liberty. There was also a smaller course down by, uh – by the [McCoy] Air Force Base, or was then a civilian airport. They had a small place down there. They had camping gear you could check out. Um, Just, really great support. I think that was an asset for this – this community – the Navy community.

Van Zandt Okay. Um, did they have a local base newspaper?

Sloane They did have a local base newspaper, and for the life of me, I'd have to think. I'd have to wake up at 3 in the morning to remember the name of it. I think it was *The Navigator* or something like that, and the fella named Jim Allen ran it, when I was there. He was sort of the – the editor. Uh, a great asset. I think it came out once a week, but Again, it covered the news, and all the good news, and, uh, that sort of thing. I – I got very familiar with the paper. I always wanted to make sure they – that if my activity had something to promote, it was in there, and it – they did a great job. It was a great asset.

0:32:31

Advanced training

Van Zandt 'Kay. After basic training, what other types of schools did you guys offer here at NTC?

Sloane Right. Well, Service School Command had four, uh, ratings, if you will – trade – Trade skills that they trained to. Uh, one was electronics technician, one was torpedoman, uh, one was quartermaster, and the other was signalman. So again we did that, and Nuclear Power School – they had two different, uh, schools, if you will: Nuclear Power A School, and I can't for the life of me recall what the other division was called, but it was sort of like a lower division and an upper division, and their training, um – it went up to a lot of the skills and requirements of operating nuclear power plants. Uh, they had a lot of senior officers, who would go into command of nuclear powered ships, who went through that program. Very, very, uh, effective training program.

Van Zandt Alright, alright[?]. Um, did you have any shore maintenance that was done here? Did anything get sent back to have work done here locally for work done...

Sloane You know...

Van Zandt From the ships?

Sloane I don't believe that we did. I think, um, most of any maintenance that went on was supporting, uh, what was happening at the base, uh – that sort of thing, but it wasn't like equipment was coming back from the fleet

Van Zandt Yeah[?].

Sloane For maintenance.

Van Zandt Mmhmm.

Sloane Because that was all done at the fleet site's shore locations, if you will.

0:33:51

Central Florida airbases

Van Zandt What about airbases? Uh, 'cause we have airbases here. Were we doing any work for the airbase maintenance?

Sloane No, again, the Navy, um—a lot of that air training was done in Memphis, where a lot of the air raidings were done in Millington, if you will.

Van Zandt Mmhmm.

Sloane Again, um, if you're talking about, like, [Naval Air Station] Jacksonville, which had a Naval Air Station up there and added their own—their facilities up there. So we really weren't training aviation raidings.

Van Zandt So our airbases here had been pretty much downgraded?

Sloane Um...

Van Zandt The old airbases?

Sloane Well, Naval Air Station Sanford became the Orlando-Sanford...

Van Zandt [inaudible]?

Sloane Uh, International, uh, Airport. Um, uh, the Orlando International Airport was McCoy Air Force Base. Um, and, um, it's always, uh, enjoyable when I drive down there and have a moment to scoot in by where the old [Boeing] B-52 [Stratofortress] is parked.³ I think so many people in this community don't know it's there, haven't had the opportunity to go down there where you can walk right up to it and kick the tires on this gigantic airplane. Up in, uh, Orlando-Sanford—which I'm sure the locals don't know about—uh, there was a small civilian community, uh, that, uh decided to refurbish a [North American RA-5C] Vigilante, an A-5 aircraft, which is on display, uh, at the entrance to the airport up there. My wife and I had occasion to work with that committee and help, uh, put it in place, and, uh, that's—that's a sight, I'll tell ya, and they're working on refurbishing other aircraft for display up there.

Van Zandt Great[?].

Sloane Yeah.

Van Zandt Now, I know we had Tactical Air Command and Army Air Force[s] Training Command here, at one time. Did you have an occasion to work on any joint exercises with them?

Sloane No, that was way before my time.

Van Zandt Okay.

Sloane That was when they wore the leather helmets.

Van Zandt [laughs].

³ B-52 Memorial Park.

Sloane [laughs].

0:35:39 **Simulation industry**

Van Zandt They have—the do still have the simulator training and stuff that goes on here with the [U.S.] Joint Forces [Command]? Did you...

Sloane Well, the, uh...

Van Zandt Participate in any of that?

Sloane The Navy—the, um, Naval Air Warfare Training Center [Systems Division]...⁴

Van Zandt Mmhmm.

Sloane Here in Orlando, is part of the Research Park activity, the military's presence, uh, joint services are there, mostly contracting for, uh, training and simulation work. That's why all of these defense contractors have set up shop here in Orlando, so that they can have close act[sic]—access to those folks, but there's a lot of activity taking on—taking in that area, right here in Orlando. Very important to the community.

Van Zandt Right. I know the, uh, base has tied to developing technology and simulations. Were you involved in any of the future simulation exercises that were currently...

Sloane No, really...

Van Zandt Conducted by the military?

Sloane That all used to be located at the Naval Training Center, and, of course, as it expanded, uh, I remember—I can't tell you the exact year, but it was when I was in service here that they built the [Luis] De Florez Center, here in the Research Park, and moved that operation out there, and grew it, and had just a tremendous expansion of not only that joint service activity out there, but again, the growth in the Research Park of defense contractors who have come here to Orlando, but I did not work directly with the training and simulation activities here.

0:37:01 **Hardest aspect, proudest moment, and memories from NTC Orlando**

Van Zandt Okay. Thank you. Um, what's the hardest thing you remember doing while you were, um, a Commander at the NTC?

Sloane Pushups.

Van Zandt Pushups? [laughs].

⁴ Correction: Naval Air Warfare Center Training Systems Division (NAWCTSD).

Sloane [laughs] Yeah, well, you, um—I think “hardest” is a tough word. When you say “hardest,” uh, you know, I—I’ll change it over to what was the most, uh, difficult, uh, and that was the discipline. Um, Having to, uh, work with young people, who, again, had a lapse in—in judgment and came before you, because of some infraction—some minor, some not so minor, but it was always, I say, a little disappointment—maybe a little heartfelt, because it—in the back, you’ll say to yourself, uh, *This youngster can do better*. You’ve tried to provide them and your team to[?] guidance. Everybody makes a mistake, once in a while, and—and while there were those who, you know, were more than willing to atone for their sins, so to speak, and get back on track. Eh, there was the rare exception who was not the right person for the service and you had to ask them to leave, and, uh, I think—so when you say what was the “hardest,” it was that. You felt like to some degree, you failed. Now, some degree you—you can’t change some people—that sort of thing. So that was probably the most difficult, really.

Van Zandt Alright. From the most difficult, when did you feel the most proud at NTC?

Sloane Well, I think, um, every time you had a graduation, you know? Uh, every time you set sailor from your school out to the fleet, and you felt that they were—your team had prepared them, uh, very well to do the job, and that they would go out, and the people in fleet were going to look back and say, “Now, that sailor came from NTC Orlando. He or she was trained right.”

Van Zandt Okay. Um, is there a particular story, um, from your time at the NTC that you’ll never forget?

Sloane Oh, there’s a million of them. A million of them. We used to—we had a lot of fun. I mean, if you don’t have fun—that’s not to say that every day was a good day, uh, but if you don’t come away, uh, with a balance sheet that says you had more fun than not, you’re probably either not doing it right or don’t belong there and, uh, every year, uh, the, uh, Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society would hold a fund drive. Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society is just what it sounds. It’s a[sic] organization—civilian organization—that, uh, provides release services for men and women in the Navy and the Marines who have had hardship. Whether it’s a house fire, a death in the family, some serious illness, they—they’re there to support with finances and services, if[?] necessary.

So every year they had a fund drive Throughout the Navy, and our little piece at the Navy Training Center broke down the individual commands, and what we did, for the time that I was there, we had a little carnival, or a cookout, or whatever every year in support of that, and my wife and I would put on a skit every year. So we did about three skits, during the time I was there, and [laughs]—and, uh, let’s see if I can remember them in the right order. One year, we did, uh a sk—it wasn’t a skit, but it was a song called “Lydia and the Tattooed Lady,” which [Julius] “Groucho” [Henry] Marx made famous, and I dressed up as Lydia the Tattooed Lady. My wife dressed up as Groucho Marx. The Navy band came and played the music.

Van Zandt [laughs].

Sloane And out we went and did it for the crowd, and then one year, we did, uh, from, uh, *South Pacific*, uh—uh, the number “Honey Bun,” where—if you’re not familiar with it—this, um, senior sailor gets dressed up in a grass skirt and, um—and, um, uh, the Navy nurse dresses up as a sailor and sings about, uh, his girlfriend—his honey bun. So I dressed up in the grass skirt, and my wife dressed up in the sailor suit, and sang the song, and the Navy band played along, and then the last year we did, uh, “Get Me to the Church on Time” from *My Fair Lady*. So there I was in—in bridal regalia and she was, uh, dressed up as a, uh, groom going to the church, and we had great fun doing that. It made—let’s just say it made the base newspaper [laughs].

Van Zandt That sounds wonderful.

Sloane Yeah.

Van Zandt Um, were there any other areas of the base that were of particular importance to you or the sailors?

Sloane Well, one of things, you—you know, everything was important, whether it was the commissary or what have you, but I remember Lake Baldwin, you know, which Baldwin Park is named after, if you will, and so many of the, uh, people who had the opportunity would go out there and fish on Lake Baldwin, or be at one of the clubs, whether it was the enlisted club or officer’s club, which looked out on Lake Baldwin. It was sort of, um, just the center of things, not necessarily geographically, but, uh, when you drove home, you went by it. That sort of thing. It was always there. The sort of Place a lot of people, uh, looked forward to seeing, or recreating on, what have you. The Maple Hospital overlooked Lake Baldwin. The golf course was off of Lake Baldwin. Uh, that sort of thing I remember very much.

0:42:51

Leaving the Navy and keeping in touch with friends

Van Zandt Um, I know what you did when you left the Navy. You went to work for the USO. Do you recall the day your service ended?

Sloane The day my service ended? Yeah. Well, you know, like most senior people in the service, they have some sort of retirement ceremony for you. Change of command is what it really was, where, um, uh—a good friend of mine, uh, Captain Harry Smith—U.S. Navy retired, still here in Central Florida, uh,—relieved me of that job, and that was a very emotional day. It may not have be the—my last day—maybe it was the last day. Uh, it was just, uh, a very emotional time for me, um, in concluding that service, and reflecting back on all the years of service, all the assignments, the family, uh that sort of thing. So that’s my reflection on my last day, if you will

Van Zandt Have you kept in touch with people from the Navy?

Sloane Oh, absolutely. Um, [laughs] there's one warrant officer, uh, who served with me in Vietnam. He was the maintenance officer for the river section, and he, uh, sort of, uh, made it his business to stay in touch with, uh, those of us who were still around, and so, um, an email contact with him. As I said, Captain Smith, who relieved me of the Naval Training Service School Command job, um, was a good personal friend here. Dave Arms, retired Navy Captain, who was Commanding Officer of the [U.S.] Naval Reserve Center here in Orlando for a while, uh—still here, and, uh, we stay in touch. Um, you hear from some people every once in a while. One of the most poignant things I recall, uh, is: many, many, years went by, uh, after I had left Vietnam, and as I said, we lost a couple of people in our section, and I, over the years, received just a handful of correspondence from, uh, relatives of the people we lost, um, asking about them, and I responded to those people, and that was, in a way, staying in touch.

Van Zandt Was that hard?

Sloane Oh, it—well, it was hard on—it wasn't hard. Uh, I was glad to hear from them and to be able to tell them that, uh, their relative had served honorably.

0:45:22

Lessons learned, the lasting legacy of NTC Orlando, and the Lone Sailor Memorial Project

Van Zandt Um, what values or characteristics do you believe that the Navy made, um—that instilled in you a great impression for the rest of your life?

Sloane Well, I think discipline, and I—I mean that in the finest sense of the word. Organization, uh, good order, wanting to see things in the right place, um, making decisions, you know—right or wrong. Somebody's gotta make that decision. Uh, working with others towards a common goal—that sort of thing.

Van Zandt Your lasting legacy with the, um, NTC in Orlando and the Navy's legacy, um, in Central Florida—what do you think, um, is the lasting legacy in Orlando?

Sloane Well, I think the lasting legacy [sniffs] is a couple of different things. One is: people, like myself, who are here and remain here, who chose to stay for many different reasons. Uh, but we have a tremendous veterans' population here. People who served here and came back—I see a lot of that up in Sanford. You know, people—there's a lot of, um, people who don't, uh, know about the Naval Air Station Sanford, and, uh—and I had the opportunity to meet a lot of them during the restoration of the vigilante aircraft. Boy, they came out of the woodwork, um, for that, and so that's one, uh—one thing. I think what we're doing at—at, um, Baldwin Park, with the Lone Sailor Memorial [Project] is a great, great thing. Uh, that will stand forever and, uh, when generations go by, people will still know that there was a Naval Training Center activity here, hundreds and thousands of young men and women passed through here in service to their nation. Um, you can't do more than that.

Van Zandt How do you think that the former Navy personnel would like to see or reminded, um, at the memorial?

Sloane Well, I think that the Lone Sailor Memorial is a very, very appropriate, uh, recognition of what took place here over the years. I think, uh, there's so much pride in—in veterans. I don't care whether they did 20 years or a four-year hitch in the Navy. I have rarely spoken to an individual who served, especially in the Navy, uh, who didn't come away saying "It was a good experience for me." That sort of thing.

Van Zandt Okay. Um, when we're looking at, uh, designing the [Blue Jacket] Park, what do you think they would like to see at the park?

Sloane Oh, nautical—Things of the nautical nature. I remember, when I [*laughs*] was, uh—had command at the Naval Training Center, and one of things, I think—my recollection of up at the Great Lakes is the—by—by virtue of the fact that it was a very, uh—I don't want to use "old" in the wrong word—but it had been there for...

Van Zandt [*laughs*].

Sloane Since 1903,⁵ I think. They had accumulated a lot of maybe history there. Whether it was an anchor, or a gun, or what have you, and so as you walked around that base, if you will, a [*inaudible*] you saw a lot of these things And You knew you were at a military facility or a naval facility, and when I came to Orlando, one of things I asked my, uh, team to do was to bring some of those Navy artifacts to—to our activity, and I'll never forget, uh, we brought two big—what we call "24-inch searchlights"—no longer in use in the fleet, but these, uh—If you see the movies and you see the big arc lights things searching for planes in the sky, and I, uh—I charged one of our officers. Uh, I said, uh, you know, "Get in touch with the—the old shipyards, who[sic] have this stuff in excess, and let's see if we can't get one." They did. They brought it and it was mounted in front of the school. they got a, uh, uh, four-barrel—I think it was a 4-barrell—a 40-millimeter gun mount brought it down and got it there, and that was—when the base was closed, I think they transferred it, to my recollection, to the, uh, Oviedo High School and JROTC [Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps] unit, and they may still be there. I haven't been in the back lot for a while.

So I think—and I remember that, uh, the torpedo—and it was a very strong World War II torpedo CO—submarine community here in Orlando, and I remember over at, eh, um—I don't—it wasn't near the USO, but it was somewhere over there in that vicinity, near the RTC [Recruit Training Center Orlando]. They had got these old World War II torpedoes and put them on display, and so I think, eh, you know, any of those type materials that can be

⁵ Correction: Naval Station Great Lakes was approved in 1904 and dedicated in 1911.

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brought, appropriately placed in and around Blue Jacket Park, uh, would really be a great reminder of, uh, the service that these people gave to their country.

Van Zandt Thank you.

Sloane Mmhmm.

Van Zandt You've exhausted my list. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me?

Sloane Have a great Navy Day.

Van Zandt Aww.

Sloane [laughs].

Van Zandt Thank you so much

Sloane You're welcome.

Van Zandt I appreciate your time.

Sloane My pleasure.

Van Zandt I'm ready to stop recording.

End of Interview